



Honorable Marriage according to St. Athanasius

By
Fr. Matthias F. Wahba

HONORABLE MARRIAGE

ACCORDING TO
ST. ATHANASIVS

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PH. D. THESIS

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ABBREVIATIONS

SOME OF THE WRITINGS OF ST. ATHANASIUS

<i>Ad Ant.</i>	Letter to the Church of Antioch.
<i>Ad Cons.</i>	Defence before Constantius.
<i>Ad Ep. Aeg.</i>	Circular to the Bishops of Egypt and Libya.
<i>Ap. Ar.</i>	Defence against the Arians.
<i>Con. Ar.</i>	Discourses against the Arians.
<i>Con. Gen.</i>	Against the Heathen.
<i>De Dec.</i>	Defence of the Nicene Council.
<i>De Dion.</i>	Defence of Dionysius of Alexandria.
<i>De Inc.</i>	On the Incarnation.
<i>De Syn.</i>	On the Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia.
<i>Ep. Encyc.</i>	Encyclical Letter.
<i>Ep. Serap. H. S.</i>	The Letters to Serapion concerning the Holy Spirit.
<i>Ex. Fid.</i>	Statement of Faith.
<i>FL Cop.</i>	Festal Letters, Coptic Text. French translation of the Coptic text is published by L-Th. Lefort in <i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i> , vol. 151, pp. 1-45.
<i>FL Syr.</i>	Festal Letters, Syriac Text.
<i>Fuga</i>	Defence of his Flight.
<i>Hist. Ar.</i>	History of the Arians.
<i>Illud</i>	On Luke 10:22.
<i>Vit. Ant.</i>	Life of St. Antony.

SOME REFERENCES

- ANF* *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translation of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325.*
- CSCO* *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium.*
- LNPF* *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, unless indicated otherwise, refers to 2nd series, vol. IV, *St. Athanasius' Select Works and Letters*, edited by A. Robertson. This reference is meant when the number of the page only is mentioned.
- PG* *Patrologia Graeca*, edited by J. P. Migne, Paris, 1875.

INTRODUCTION

The fourth century A.D. is commonly regarded as a turning point in the history of Christianity, for at this time the religion became adopted by the Roman emperors. The Great Persecution flared in the first decade of this century, while the other decades saw religious freedom and the combination of the Church and the State with its advantages and disadvantages. This century witnessed also the first of the Ecumenical Councils in the history of the Church, as well as the birth and flourishing of the monastic movement. The Canon of Scripture took its last shape, and most of the theological and ecclesiastical formulae and practices were settled. Moreover, the fourth century is known as the golden age of the Church Fathers.

St. Athanasius the Great was the Bishop of Alexandria and the Popeⁱ of the Coptic Church from 328 to 373 A.D. A chronicle of his ministry, established immediately after his death and later entitled "Historia Acephala", states that he was criticized by his opponents because he had not reached the canonical age of thirty years at the time of his election. He was absorbed totally in his enormous pastoral mission. As a diligent bishop, he struggled against Arianism, the most aggressive heresy of his time. Motivated by pastoral zeal, he saw in it a great danger to the salvation and sanctification of his people. More than any one else, he worked to secure the triumph of the faith of Nicaea. Five times he was driven into exile, kept away from his See for seventeen years, and succeeded by Arian usurpers. Several attempts were made to remove him by military force, in spite of the furious opposition of his people. He believed in what he asserted,

and sacrificed his security, reputation, and even his friends; so he became the symbol of the unconquerable Church. He was acknowledged by one of his contemporaries, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, as "the law of orthodoxy and the cornerstone of the Fathers." (*Orat.* 21) The works of Athanasius were widely circulated and recognized as having great importance and value.

The doctrine of sanctification was always present in the mind of the great Pope of Alexandria as the final purpose of his pastoral efforts, as well as the main goal of his fight against Arianism. He preached that unless Christ is God, He does not have the power to grant the human being the life of sanctification. The word "sanctification" is used by Athanasius to mean purification and holiness. ⁱⁱ He saw it as a grace granted by the Lord with the purpose of purifying and sanctifying the life of mankind. ⁱⁱⁱ However, sanctification has been a special interest of the author for many years. His M.A. Thesis, presented in 1985, is titled: *The Doctrine of Sanctification in St. Athanasius' Paschal Letters*, published by St. Mary and St. Mena Church, Rhode Island, 1988.

One of the important aspects of sanctification in Christian society is its relation to marriage; a pastoral problem in the ministry of Athanasius. The Church of Alexandria in his days witnessed different ascetic tendencies with the beginning of monasticism and the spread of non-Christian movements, such as Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Stoicism, and Neoplatonism. It was a simple matter to equate "holy" with "ascetic". ^{iv} Athanasius himself, at his election, was acclaimed by the Christian community of Alexandria as "one of the ascetics." ^v He had a close

relationship with the Desert Fathers. Moreover, he was the first biographer of St. Antony, and the first incumbent of the See of Alexandria to welcome monks to become bishops. As a watchful pastor, he used to visit his people throughout Egypt, and dealt with families as well as with monasteries. No doubt, he faced the problem of the conflicting religious attitudes towards marriage.

Although the Bishop of Alexandria shows sanctification as the implicit goal of his ministry, his fight with the Arians took up most of his life, activities and writings. This is why no modern scholar addressed our subject. As shown in the Bibliography, the view of marriage of two of the Alexandrian writers, Clement of Alexandria and Origen, is discussed by J. P. Broudehoux and H. Crouzel respectively. The attitude of other Church Fathers is examined in general by some authors who studied the history of marriage and sexuality in the Ancient Church, such as D. S. Bailey, P. Brown, H. Crouzel, R. Gryson, G. H. Joyce, J. E. Kerns, B. I. Murstein, R. P. A. Raes, E. Schillebeeckx, P. Veyne and others. There are but few allusions to Athanasius.

The doctrine of sanctification in Athanasius is generally presented by J. B. Berchem, R. Bernard, L. Bouyer, I. H. Dalmais, G. Gross, J. Roldanos, M. Scott, C.N. Tsirpanlis, D. Unger and others. The subject of marriage is merely deduced from Athanasius' writings, most of which were exclusively directed against Arianism. However, the doctrine of sanctification in relation to marriage according to this great Father has not yet been addressed.

This thesis is an attempt to explore St. Athanasius' doctrine of sanctification in relation to marriage. The methodology is both historical and sociological.

As far as method is concerned, the reader is entitled to know that we want it to be as scientific as possible. We mean generally by "scientific" that we will abide by the facts, more specifically, that we will put forward Athanasius' doctrine on the basis of documentary evidence and within the context of contemporary opinions, producing in this way a considerable amount of literary and social data. We mean also very pointedly that we will present Athanasius as a sociologist (see Chapter V) which of course he was not by any strict understanding of this word, but in the sense of which he can and should be pictured to account for his relatively nuanced and empirical understanding of human kind.

To set up Athanasius as a sociologist should be interpreted, on one side, in a positive sense. By modern standards, if and to the extent that Athanasius was a sociologist, he was thinking in a way and by a method which were capable of bringing him closer to the truth. On the other side, the narrow limits within which this prominent Church Father indulged in some sort of strictly objective thinking point to the fact that otherwise his approach was not scientific and that his concepts were all stamped with the metaphysical seal of ancient philosophy.

It follows, then, that our objective and scientific effort will result in laying out a detailed presentation of Christian beliefs couched mainly in a philosophical language. We owe to the reader the candid confession that we believe Athanasius to be generally right. We are aware at the same

time that such a belief makes it impossible for our work to be entirely scientific, for what no doubt we stand to be approved by some and blamed by others. Honestly, we could not do otherwise.

Our primary sources are the original text in Coptic. They are found in Migne, Thomson, and others, as far as the Greek texts, and in Lefort as far as the Coptic. See the bibliography.

Chapter I will present the background for marriage in Egypt, in order to shed some light upon the atmosphere in which Athanasius lived. The attitude of non-Christian religions and the approach of other philosophical schools will be examined. Actually, a form of Paganism, i.e., the ancient Egyptian religion, and Judaism were present in Egypt before Christianity appeared. Although it has been suggested that Gnosticism is a pre-Christian phenomenon developed on Jewish soil,^{vi} but it seems to have flourished after Christianity prevailed. Manichaeism, Stoicism, and Neoplatonism were also present in fourth century Egypt. The Roman law of marriage, which was in theory to be applied by the Roman Empire upon all subjects, may present the general view of the society on marriage. Tracing these viewpoints will help us find out how marriage, in relation to sanctification, was regarded outside Christianity.

Chapter II will demonstrate the Christian view of sanctification in relation to marriage in Egypt before Athanasius. This view is particularly reflected by Clement of Alexandria and Origen. So, their different attitudes towards the issue will also be discussed.

Then we come to the doctrine of Athanasius. The basic elements of sanctification will be outlined in chapter III. Some stress will be put on ideas that have a connection to marriage.

Chapter IV will survey the subject of marriage and conjugal relations in terms of Athanasius' doctrine of sanctification; the value of matter in general and the human body in particular, his idea of the sanctity of marriage, sexuality and procreation, his view of virginity and asceticism, then his teaching of marriage in relation to eschatology.

The last chapter will include a sociological analysis; legal, moral, ascetic, and socio-anthropological aspects will be discussed. The legal aspect will show to what extent Athanasius defended the institution against those who attacked it on religious grounds. The moral aspect will deal with the concept of natural law which prevailed at that time and influenced the view of marriage. The ascetic aspect will analyze different ascetic trends; and then the particular attitude of Athanasius. Finally, the socio-anthropological aspect will include the value of the human being, the value of woman, and the concept of the elite in relation to marriage.

NOTES

- i This is the ordinary title of the bishop of Alexandria until present. Athanasius was thus addressed by the clergymen, *Ap. Ar.*, 63-64; and the Emperor Constantine, *ibid.*, 67-68, cf. *PG* 25.364,369, Tw Papa Aqanasiw. His predecessor Alexander too was so called pope, *De Syn.*, 16; cf. *PG* 26.708, Tw makariw Papa Kai episkopw Alexandrw. The title is used also in the *Festal Index* which was written shortly after his death, cf. *LNPF*, pp. 502-505.
- ii G. Muller, *Lexicon Athanasianum*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1952. p. 8; G. Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1964, vol I, pp. 111-113; G.W.H. Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, London, 1961, p. 17.
- iii Athanasius, *Con. Ar.*, I.46-47; II.15; III.33; cf. also *infra*, ch. III.
- iv P. Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1982, pp. 103-152.
- v *Ap. Con. Ar.*, 6.
- vi B.A. Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judiasm, and Egyptian Christianity*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990, p. 28.

CHAPTER I

NON-CHRISTIAN VIEWS ON MARRIAGE IN THE FIRST CENTURIES C. E.

Egyptian society under the Roman Empire included basically native Egyptians, Greeks, Romans and Jews. Alexandria, the capital of Egypt at that time and the second city of the Empire, was without doubt a "cosmopolitan" city. In addition to the local Egyptian culture, Alexandria was a center of Hellenism and of Judaism with a large community of Jews. Nevertheless, texts dating from the first three centuries of the Christian era bear evidence to the very close relations that existed between Alexandrians and their kinsmen and friends hundreds of miles away in Middle and Upper Egypt. ¹

Native people, called Copts ² after the Arab invasion, are the direct descendants of the ancient Egyptians. A large proportion of them were peasants and made up the bulk of the labor force in the country. They continued to perform the same economic tasks they had performed under the Ptolemies. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans wished to be assimilated into the culture they had conquered. In time, a number of native Egyptians were incorporated into the army, became private land owners, and married Greek citizens. The

Romans, however, exerted social domination over the country. It is not surprising in this ethnic mix to find resistance of Greeks to Roman supremacy, and numerous clashes between both of them and the Jews.³ This milieu of dissension, beside economic pressure and the decay of old religions, most probably paved the way for Christianity and other religions to flourish in the Nile Valley.

The following section will deal with non-Christian views on marriage in Egypt in the first centuries of the Christian era.

I.1 PAGANISM

As mentioned before, there were, at the time of St. Athanasius, three groups of pagans: Old Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. The view of marriage for the first group, as the majority, will be discussed here as part of the thesis. A later examination of Roman law of marriage will reflect the Roman and Greek viewpoint. An in depth study of the approach of the Greeks and Romans of Egypt may be kept for further research.

The old Egyptian family was based on a matriarchal system. All landed property descended in the female line from mother to daughter. A man enjoyed the property of his wife as long as she lived; but on her death, it passed to her daughter and consequently her daughter's husband. To secure hereditary use of rights in a community with matriarchal tendencies, close endogamy might often be convenient. This practice was observed strictly in the royal family which claimed the distinction of divine descent, and to them would be permitted acts which could hardly be allowed to their subjects. Thus, it was common practice for a pharaoh to marry his daughter.⁴

This custom of matrilineal descent explains the marriages of Hatshepsut and Cleopatra, but such marriages between brothers and sisters were not the normal practice.⁵ Therefore, it is not fair to judge ancient Egyptian morality by notorious practices found during some periods of ancient Egyptian

history. However, Cambyses was told by the priests of Egypt that no law permitted incestuous marriages, but a pharaoh could do as he willed.⁶ Nevertheless, under the Ptolemies, marriage with sisters and half-sisters was not uncommon among farmers and artisans, encouraged perhaps by the example of the gods, Osiris and Isis.⁷ Moreover, evidence has been found in marriage records that brother-sister marriage was not rare among Egyptian commoners during the Roman rule of Egypt. It is suggested that the primary motivation for such marriage lay in the estate laws which permitted women to inherit property. A brother could marry his sister to preserve the integrity of the estate.⁸

As the descent in general was traced back on the mother's side rather than the father's, all fixed property was in the woman's hands. This may have had some influence on the relatively greater measure of equality between the sexes in Egypt.⁹ The condition of females, according to Diodorus, was favorable and partook of the general character of humanity and refinement which belonged to that country.¹⁰ However, the custom of female inheritance gave Egyptian women considerable power and importance.¹¹

Although several wives may be recorded on a tomb, there are few cases of more than one wife living at the same time.¹² Polygamy was not allowed for the priests, and in the marshy and poor districts of Lower Egypt, monogamy prevailed.¹³

Undoubtedly, polygamy was royal in origin; it was as usual with the kings of Egypt as with most other sovereigns. ¹⁴ It was required that the first wife be of the husband's rank; the succeeding wives really holding the position of concubines. ¹⁵ They, however, had no legal status, and were distinct from the proper wife. If more than one wife is mentioned on a tomb, it would seem that, except in the case of large houses of royal wives and concubines, the one had succeeded the other as a "house mother". Women described as concubines often were merely female servants, and had no part in the family organization; ¹⁶ but all children, whether by wives or concubines, were equally legitimate. ¹⁷ Even if several wives were taken, one of them, the Lady of the house, enjoyed a superior position of honor and authority over the rest. ¹⁸ She held a higher rank and was treated with the utmost deference, sharing with her husband his social life as well as inspections of his estate. ¹⁹

Many letters and tomb-inscriptions bear witness to the love and respect which the Egyptian bore toward his wife. ²⁰ On the monuments, the wife is always represented as equal to the husband. She was also considered essential for the future life. If no painting was used, a pottery model of a couch with a woman's figure was made, and sometimes a child on it. ²¹ Whereas in some Eastern lands, the male children were more important than the female, the Egyptian names of daughters show an equal honor with sons. ²² The religious customs of the old Egyptians forbade abandonment of children. ²³

Marriage was entered into soon after puberty. Young men were advised to marry early and beget children, the possession of whom was considered the greatest happiness. ²⁴ Besides, marriage was described as a way to avoid falling into the snares of adultery. ²⁵ A written declaration, represented by a contract of marriage between the bride and the bridegroom, played an important part. ²⁶ In the ancient world, Egypt was the first to regard marriage as an agreement between the couple intending to be married. As a result, in Egypt the way was open for the real formation of a "marriage of love." ²⁷

Although no documentation of the ceremonials or festivities of marriage have been recognized among tomb or temple inscriptions, it is suggested that at the time of Alexander the Great, and possibly from early times, the priest had a function to fulfill in marriages in connection with a marriage document. He was not present in a purely religious capacity to hallow the union, but rather in an official one. ²⁸

The surviving contracts show that the woman's rights were well respected. In the event of divorce by the husband, adequate compensation had to be made to the wife by the return of her marriage portion and a proportion of the property that had been acquired during the marriage. Similarly, a wife wishing to divorce her husband had to return half her dowry. Thus, a woman in Ancient Egypt, was enabled to go to court and to administer her

own properties. Of the treatment of widows, not much is known beyond that their state made them objects of pity, and they were to be treated with justice and charity.²⁹

Family relationships and morals were considered of vital importance. The father had the chief authority in his home, and the youths had great respect for their fathers. Human relations were regarded as a most valuable tradition, thus the togetherness of a husband and wife and the closeness of brothers and sisters were stressed.³⁰ The Egyptian was happy to stay at home with his family, spending his leisure time in his house and enjoying an occasional day's hunting in the desert or fishing or fowling along the Nile.³¹ Matters of sexual behavior were dealt with by the ancient Egyptians with discretion, and immorality was strongly condemned.³² Men were admonished not to have any physical association with boys while concubines were placed in a special category and kindly treated.³³ It is remarkable that sexual creative power was represented in the ancient Egyptian religion by the goat and the bull; they were not merely symbols of Osiris but incarnations of him. Osiris often was portrayed with large and prominent sexual organs as a mark of his supreme power. Models of him in this form were borne in religious processions,³⁴ and although there are clear signs of sex worship, the Egyptians refused to mix license with religion, a mixture which was common in other cultures.³⁵

Native Egyptians were probably motivated by their deities to maintain positive views of marriage. Isis was believed to be the founder of "the institution of marriage, the fidelity of spouse, filial regard for parents." The *Litany of Oxyrhynchus* affirms, "You have given to women a power equal to that of men."³⁶ The long list of titles used of Isis records:

I am wife and sister of King Osiris ...

I brought together women and men.

I appointed two women to bring their infants to birth in the tenth month.

I ordained that parents should be loved by children ...

I devised marriage contracts.³⁷

The worship of Isis, the patron of marriage, was predominant in Greco-Roman world. In the days of Trajan, it was a world religion.³⁸ Her story was written in detail in the beginning of the second century A.D. by Plutarch. Isis, the sister, wife, and helper of Osiris, was elevated to be considered "a patron of piety." About fifty years after the work of Plutarch, Apuleius wrote his story, the *Metamorphoses*, or The Golden Ass. He describes Isis as "a mother-goddess" and "the creator" who remains in close inspiring touch with her creation."³⁹ We are informed by Athanasius that, during his time, Isis, Osiris and Horus were worshipped and "invested" with the honor of the true God. He adds, "In Egypt, even to this day, the death-dridge is celebrated for Osiris and Horus."⁴⁰

It is possible that these concepts have been preserved throughout the ages. M. Kamil asserts that the life of the Egyptian woman; her clothes, ornaments and jewelry in the Coptic era, is an image of her life both in ancient times and at present.⁴¹ N.E. Scott also writes, "Things have been done in the traditional way in Egypt, so that we can often interpret ancient pictures by recent day customs." He adds, "Changes and developments did of course occur, but they add comparatively little to an understanding of Egyptian life."⁴² For example, the Egyptians kept firmly the system of linking the Pharaohs with their gods Horus and Osiris. Although the rulers became Macedonian and Roman intruders, "this tradition was stoutly maintained." In addition, the process of syncretism or mingling of deities produced the cult of Sarapis who was "a god of Egyptian origin and derived from the worship of Osiris-Apis, called Osor-Hapy or Oserapis in the Memphite Sarapeum." Nevertheless, "the native Egyptians continued for their parts to worship Osor-Hapy and not Sarapis, the hellenized figure."⁴³ Probably, the reason of this conservative attitude is that the Egyptians were strongly influenced by the stable land of "the life-giving Nile," to the extent that they were accused by Philo of deifying their land.⁴⁴

Finally it should be noted that asceticism was common to the Ancient Egyptians. The priests of the famous bull were celibate, and polygamy was not allowed to the rest of the priests.⁴⁵ An ascetic community gathered in the fourth century B.C. in the Western Desert near Fayoum. It may well be

known that the fertility of this remote part at the Libyan border with Egypt was due to the reclamation and irrigation by a group which wished to withdraw from the ordinary course of life. Recluses of the Serapeum have been identified from a group of family papers. This record dates from about 170 B.C.; but similar recluses were known in 211 A.D., when some were devoted to the Lord Serapis and others to the Holy Celestial God.⁴⁶ The group of recluses devoted to Serapis immured themselves in his temple at Memphis and lived wholly apart from the world. The custom continued for at least four centuries, and records testify that around 400 A.D. it was to be found in the Serapeum at Alexandria.⁴⁷

The distinctive features then of marriage in Old Egyptian society were a relatively matriarchal society, with corresponding rights of position and property for women, as well as the use of legal documents and contracts, and recourse to the courts in marriage and property disputes. In addition, marriage had a religious character signified by the presence of a priest. Old Egyptian attitudes held high regard for sexual morality, and respectable view of women.

I.2 JUDAISM

Jews lived in Alexandria with its founding in 332 B.C. by Alexander the Great. In the first century A.D., they were close to a million and occupied two of the five sections of the city. They played "a not inconsiderable part in the life of the city." ⁴⁸ Athanasius relates that they allied with the Arians to support Gregory, the usurper bishop. Philagrius, the prefect of Alexandria, gathered together "the heathen multitude with the Jews and disorderly persons," sending them "in a body with swords and clubs into the churches to attack the people." ⁴⁹

In this large population of Jews of Palestinian origin as well as Gentiles affiliated with them as proselytes, "a considerable degree of religious and cultural diversity would be found." ⁵⁰ Philo in the first century is an example of Jews influenced by Hellenistic culture. On the other hand, "from the second century A.D., there was steady correspondence and intercourse between the Palestinian Rabbis and the Egyptian Jews." This "exerted great influence ... shaping the Jewish community according to new principles of Judaism, as laid down by the Talmudic authorities." ⁵¹

Marriage was considered by Judaism as the ideal human state and a basic social institution established by God and blessed by Him at the time of creation. Consequently, marriage was subjected to the supervision of religion as a divine ordinance.

⁵² The Midrash ⁵³ collects sayings of various Rabbis on Gen. 2:18 about the things that the unmarried man lacks. He is "without goodness, and without a helper, and without joy, and without a blessing, and without atonement." He "diminishes the likeness of God, for He says, 'In the image of God He made man.'" ⁵⁴

Two purposes in marriage were recognized, both mentioned in the opening pages of Scripture (Gen. 1:27-28; 2:20-24). The principal purpose was to provide children, so as to preserve the husband's family and keep his father's name from dying out. ⁵⁵ To assure procreation, some Rabbis sharply condemned unions between very young and very old persons, and elaborated the Biblical prohibition for eunuchs to marry any but specified lower-caste Jewesses on the fringe of the community. ⁵⁶ The instinctive desire for children, as constituting man's renewal and immortality, is fundamental. The Talmud expresses this feeling when it declares that the poor, the blind, the leper, and he who has no children are considered dead. ⁵⁷ Companionship, as the other aspect of marital life, was recognized. This companionship, which includes sexual relation, is an end in itself in marriage. The Halakah ⁵⁸ teaches that weak, old and sterile persons should marry, even when there is no possibility of children. Rabbinic Judaism was aware of the central role of sex. Its view was that the bodily passion is not in itself evil, but in the instance of marriage is the cause of good. Without it "no one would build a house nor take a wife and beget children." ⁵⁹

Marriage, however, is highly honored in Judaism. The Hebrew legal term for marriage, "kiddushin," is interpreted in the spirit of the tradition as "the state of sanctification." It has religious associations as a sacred act by which the woman is consecrated to her husband exclusively. The term symbolizes also the religious values of the union of man and woman as a mutual consecration in the spiritual order of life. At the same time, it reflects the Biblical concept of marriage as a covenant between husband and wife.⁶⁰

The Seven Blessings pronounced by the bridegroom himself after the meal may show the Jewish sense of the sanctity of marriage. Their date is not known, but is at least Talmudic; they are already quoted in the Talmud. After the opening wine-blessing, there is the praise of God as the Creator of all things to His glory, then follows the praise of Him as creator of man; and next the benedictions pass to the creation of woman, supplication for barren Zion, and for the couple with reference to the Garden of Eden, blessing for the joy of the couple, and a long blessing and supplication for the qualities of married life. The Blessings were known by Jews in the Christian centuries. In the post-Talmudic era, they were taken over by the Rabbis.⁶¹

The Apocryphal Book, *Joseph and Asenath*,⁶² records Joseph as holding a sanctified view to marriage. Adultery is forbidden, for he kept his father's commandment: "Be on your guard, my children, against the strange woman, and have

nothing to do with her, for she is ruin and destruction." (Ch. VI) To be married to Joseph, Asenath should repent leaving the idols and worshipping God. (Ch X - XIII) The wedding was consummated in an atmosphere of prayer. Pharaoh took golden crowns and put them on their heads and said to them, "God Most High will bless you and prosper your family for ever." (Ch XXI) In addition, *The Book of Tobit*,⁶³ included in the Septuagint and the Vulgate, and accepted by Athanasius as Deutero-canonical,⁶⁴ relates that Tobias married his kinswoman Sarah according to the law. He asked for a book, "and he wrote an instrument of co-habitation ... according to the decree of the Law of Moses." (7:13-14) In the bridal chamber, Tobias and Sarah prayed that the Lord "may work mercy and deliverance" for them. The prayer reflects the notion that marriage is a holy order of God who said, "It is not good that the man should be alone, let us make him a helper like unto him." Tobias is depicted as a committed husband; he prays, "Now, I take not this my sister for lust but in truth."

Rigid morality was demanded by the Talmud in marriage life. Marital fidelity was taken for granted, at least on the wife's part.⁶⁵ Since betrothal was considered as true marriage, except that the bride lived in her father's house till her husband took her home for the wedding, unfaithfulness on her part was adultery, and thus was punishable as such.⁶⁶ All forms of licentiousness are barred as they refer to "the evil impulse", because they often

lead men to violate the canons of reason and morality.⁶⁷

Early marriages were favored for sound moral reasons. In Greco - Roman Egypt, most Jewish boys married at fourteen, and girls at twelve years of age.⁶⁸ Postponement of marriage was permitted only for students of the law, so that they might concentrate on their studies, free from family cares.⁶⁹ Endogamy, as a commandment that applies to both sexes, are generally favored. Tobit married a member of his family (1:9), and Tobias was encouraged to do the same (4:12). Although it might be understood to defend mixed marriages between Jews and Gentile proselytes, the fact that Joseph should have married Asenath, a heathen wife, seemed to be objectionable to the Rabbis. They consequently circulated that she was the child of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, born after the rape by Shekem and moved to Egypt by an angel. Asenath is shown as "quite unlike the daughters of the Egyptians, but in every respect like the Hebrews." (Ch. I) It may be mentioned that marriage of cousins was approved; and the marriage of uncle and niece (specially his sister's daughter) was not barred.⁷⁰ This kind of endogamous marriage was not uncommon in Egypt. Philo, (*De Specialibus Legibus*, III, 4:25), stresses that bashfulness would disappear if sexual relationships are legalized within the family.⁷¹ Meanwhile, a book of Jewish schismatic character, discovered among the manuscripts in the Genizah of an ancient synagogue at Cairo, brands as incest the marriage of a man and his niece. The prohibition, according to

the sectarian interpretation, is derived by analogy from the Biblical prohibition of such a union between aunt and nephew (Lev. 18:12).⁷²

Polygamy was legitimate under the Mosaic and Rabbinic laws, for neither the Bible nor the Talmud formally forbids polygamy. In the case of the levirate marriage, the Pentateuch actually ordains a second marriage.⁷³ Polygamy was common among the upper classes in Biblical times.⁷⁴ The recognized principle of Talmudic law is that a man might marry as many wives as he could support. The Rabbis discuss also jealousy and rivalry which prevail in such occasions between wives who are regarded as equals.⁷⁵ However, polygamy survived among the Jews into the Christian era. Josephus, who himself married more than one wife, states, "It is our ancient custom to have many wives at the same time."⁷⁶ Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (134,1; 141,4) taunts his interlocutor about Jews in all lands taking as many wives as they pleased.⁷⁷ According to the manuscripts of the Cairo Genizah, bigamy was condemned as adultery. This prohibition is not to be attributed to moral consideration but to a particular exegesis of Biblical laws. The violence of the language assailing the opponents shows that the controversy was acute.⁷⁸

In the late Roman and Byzantine period, Jews enjoyed the status of Roman citizens. In 212 A.D. "Constitutio Antoniniana of Caracalla" gave them Roman rights. It does not mean that "the local laws

and customs were replaced by Roman Law." A papyrus from Oxyrhynchus dated 291 A.D. shows that "the Jewish communities and the right of their members 'to live according to their ancestral laws' remained untouched." ⁷⁹ Nevertheless, several edicts affected their life. Marriage to more than one wife constituted a crime. Thus, they became subject to severe penalties for polygamy. Diocletian, in 285 A.D., extended the prohibition to cover all inhabitants of the empire. The Christian emperors reiterated it with special emphasis. ⁸⁰

Where marital harmony no longer prevails, especially in the case of the wife's adultery, the marriage can be dissolved by divorce. Probably egged on by the growing Christian preaching against divorce, the Rabbis stressed the husband's freedom to divorce his wife. In a case of proven adultery, the husband was required by the court to divorce her even if he was willing to condone the offense, especially after the death penalty for adultery had ceased to be enforced. ⁸¹

In fact, celibacy was disapproved. "Every man is bound to marry a wife in order to beget children; and he who fails in this duty is as one who sheds blood and causes the Divine Presence (shekinah) to depart from Israel." ⁸² On the other hand, we were informed only by Philo about a Jewish ascetic community living outside Alexandria near the shores of Lake Mareotis. In a treatise entitled *On the Contemplative Life*, he describes that the members, men and women alike, prayed at sunrise and sunset, devoting themselves to the study

of the Old Testament. On the Sabbath, they used to meet in "a double enclosure, one portion set aside for men, the other set aside for women. (ch. 30-33)" They observed a major feast "shared by women also, most of them aged virgins who have kept their chastity not under compulsion ... but of their own will in their ardent yearning for wisdom." (ch. 68) Philo asserts that they abstained from animal flesh and from wine. (ch. 72) ⁸³ Their daily routine was to study Scriptures and compose hymns and psalms. "Nothing in Philo's presentation suggests that the women did not write such hymns and psalms." ⁸⁴

Instruction of women in the law was rare. The Rabbis held that when a man taught his daughter the Torah, it was as if he taught her promiscuity; and the words of the Torah might be burned up rather than delivered to women. There are some allusions to six women in Rome to be "mothers of the synagogue." Bernadette J. Brooten argues that they were teachers, and also suggests the possibility of being women priests, ⁸⁵ while Peter Richardson writes that they were "probably carrying out some kind of administrative role for which family ties contributed to their selection." He adds, "They would likely have been members of leading families." Richardson, who mentions two other women in tannaitic Palestine, comments that the evidence that Jewish women played certain role of teaching "regrettably is slight, scattered in time and space, and often uncertain." ⁸⁶ However, according to the *Book of Tobit*, to educate children in the Law is primarily a male duty (4:5); but when his father

was dead, Tobit's grandmother "taught him in the Law." ⁸⁷

Concerning the Jewish attitude to women, it seems that the wives of Jewish soldiers at Elephantine, in Upper Egypt, gained rights which were practiced in Egypt. Nevertheless, "since in other respects," writes Robin Scroggs, "this colony differed sharply from traditional Judaism, ... it is precarious to judge this to be typical of Diaspora Judaism." He suggests that Josephus and Philo "probably represent more accurately than does Elephantine" the ideas of Jewish Diaspora. ⁸⁸ Josephus cites, "The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man. Let her accordingly be submissive, not for her humiliation but that she may be directed; for the authority has been give by God to the man." (*Contra Apionem* II. 201) Philo writes, "The women are best suited to the indoor life which never strays from the house, within which the middle door is taken by the maiden as their boundary and the outer door to those who have reached full manhood." (*De Specialibus Legibus* III. 169) "A woman, then, should not be a busybody, meddling with matter outside her household concerns, but should seek a life of seclusion. She should not show herself off like a vagrant in the streets before the eyes of other men, except when she has to go to the temple." (*ibid.* III. 171) He sharply depreciates the worth and place of women. He associates with woman a number of mean expressions: weak, easily deceived, cause of sin, lifeless, enslaved, unmanly, slavish, sluggish, and many others. ⁸⁹ He claims, "In us, mind

corresponds to man, the sense to woman." (*Op. Mund.* 165) Therefore, woman has no part in mind, but only in the irrational quality of the sole. However, man and woman, for him, are equal in one thing: "the reproduction of themselves in a third person." (*Quis Her.* 164)⁹⁰

We conclude that marriage in Judaism bears signs of sanctification, as ordained and blessed by God and subjected to His divine ordinance, but some elements may distort this picture. These information are based on sources which are valid within limits. For example, Philo is certainly an important source, but since he lived in the first century and represented the Hellenistic Judaism, he provides the best limited information about Jews in Egypt in the first century. Another example of this limited value is the Talmudic, Rabbinic, and the rest of Hebraic sources. They are also limited because of our ignorance about their influence in Egypt in Athanasius' time.

I.3 GNOSTICISM

The term designates a complex religious movement in the early Christian centuries which stressed salvation through a secret knowledge or *Gnosis*. It was first applied by second and third century patristic writers to a large number of teachers such as Valentinus, Basilides and many others, all of whom were regarded by the Church Fathers as Christian heretics.⁹¹ The documents that furnish information on the Gnostic sects and doctrines fall readily into two main categories. The first one consists of the descriptions contained in the extant refutations of the great patristic writers such as Irenaeus, Hippolytus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius and Epiphanius. The second category embraces the Gnostic works themselves that have been discovered in recent decades, culminating in the great collection of Gnostic documents found in 1945 near the site of the ancient village of Chenoboskion (modern Nag Hammadi), Egypt.⁹²

The chief center of Gnosticism was Alexandria where it became the heir of Jewish traditions, classical thought, and the old mysticism of oriental religions⁹³. It is in Alexandria that the greatest doctors of Gnosticism-Basilides, Carpocrates and Valentinus-flourished. Athanasius points frequently to them, as well as to Marcion, warning of their danger to Christian doctrine.⁹⁴ Clement of Alexandria, "the most reliable of early Christian writers on Gnosticism,"⁹⁵ has provided us with a systematic analysis of the various sects. Their names and sources of belief were many, and

they produced a variety of doctrinal and moral formulations.⁹⁶ However, in all this variety of doctrines, there was one significant theme: the Gnostics, without exception, challenged marriage in one way or another.⁹⁷

Most of the Gnostic schools were thoroughly dualistic, setting an infinite chasm between the spiritual world and the world of matter. They agreed in refusing to attribute the origin of the material order to the ultimate God, the God of goodness. Clement explains that the Gnostic's dualist view of creation led to two opposing attitudes toward marriage and sexuality: the extreme of a rigorous and negative asceticism on the one hand, and a licentious antinomianism on the other. Both repudiate nature; the one through abstention and the other through excess.⁹⁸

Although the adherence of the Marcionites to Gnostic dualism has been disputed, there is no doubt that their doctrine was hostile to marriage. Clement believed that they regarded birth as evil because the world was evil. It is the evil creator of the material universe who gave the command, "Increase and multiply," (Gen. 1:28) to fill the world with brutish men and women. They asserted that no spiritual, or even psychic (ordinary), believer in the Gospel would engage in sexual intercourse, and thereby increase the number of the brutish who are in any case predetermined to damnation.⁹⁹

A similarly ascetic line was adopted by Tatian and Saturninus. They, like Marcion, called marriage fornication.¹⁰⁰ Clement mentions Julius Cassianus as one of the representatives of the ascetic wing of Gnosticism. He quotes him as saying in his *Concerning Continence and Celibacy*:

Let no one say that because we have these parts, that the female body is shaped this way and the male that way, the one to receive, the other to give seed, sexual intercourse is allowed by God; for if this arrangement had been made by God, to whom we seek to attain, He would not have pronounced eunuchs blessed; nor would the Prophet have said that they are "not an unfruitful tree" (Isa. 56:3), using the tree as an illustration of the man who chooses to emasculate himself of any such notion.¹⁰¹

Clement records that Cassianus adds that the Savior "delivered by mankind from error and from this use of the generative organs."¹⁰² Striving further to support his opinion, he quotes an apocryphal gospel called the *Gospel According to the Egyptians*.¹⁰³

The ascetic Gnostics placed great reliance on the *Gospel According to the Egyptians*. For example, in a dialogue between Jesus and Salome, she asks, "Until when shall men die?" Jesus answers, "As long as women bear children." In

another text, the Savior says, "I came to destroy the works of the female." ¹⁰⁴ A saying from the *Gospel According to the Egyptians* was repeated by Julius Cassianus: "When Salome asked, 'When she would know the answer to her questions,' the Lord said, 'When you trample on the road of shame, and when the two shall be one, the male with the female, there is neither male nor female.'" ¹⁰⁵ In another saying, marriage and procreation are deprecated. When Salome said, "I would have done better had I never given birth to a child", the Lord replied, "Eat of every plant, but eat not of that which has bitterness in it." ¹⁰⁶

At the opposite extreme of the ascetic sects were the licentious groups. It is remarkable that no libertine writings have appeared in the Nag Hammadi texts. ¹⁰⁷ Nevertheless, we have some texts which reflect principles underlying such conduct. ¹⁰⁸ The most important of the licentious factions are the Carpocratians. They alleged that they had to experience "everything" for the sake of spiritual freedom, and in order to avoid having their souls return to other bodies after death. They denounced private property, marriage, and the repressive nature of the Decalogue. "The followers of Carpocrates and (his son) Epiphanes," says Clement, "think that wives should be common property." ¹⁰⁹ For this position, they cite the example of Nicolaos who, they say, "had a lovely wife; and when, after the Savior's ascension, he was accused before the Apostles of jealousy, he brought his wife into the concourse and allowed anyone who so desired to marry her." They comment that this

action was appropriate to the saying: "One must abuse the flesh."¹¹⁰ Clement adds that they misused the eucharistic feast, for after eating, "they overturn the lamps and so extinguish the light that the shame of their adulterous 'righteousness' is hidden, and they have intercourse where they will and with whom they will."¹¹¹ "They have impiously called by the name of communion any common sexual intercourse."¹¹²

In the middle way between the two extremes, the rigidly ascetic and the freely licentious, there stand Basilides and Valentinus. Basilides and his son Isidore allowed marriage on the ground that it is better to marry than to burn (cf. I Cor. 7:9); but it was to be avoided by the man who was ambitious to attain perfection. After his death, Basilides' followers departed from their master's teaching and fell into licentious ways, and "by living lewder lives than the most uncontrolled heathen, they brought blasphemy upon his name."¹¹³ According to Irenaeus, Basilides taught that the practice of all lusts was a matter of indifference, and said, "Marrying and bearing children are from Satan."¹¹⁴

Valentinus, too, approved of marriage and emphasized copulation saying: "Whosoever being in this world does not so love a woman as to obtain possession of her is not of the truth nor shall he attain to the truth,"¹¹⁵ but his reason was most unusual. For him, the godhead, which is the *pleroma*, consists of thirty spiritual beings, the aeons. The *pleroma* was produced by marriage of pairs until the full thirty aeons are attained. In the

Valentinian sect, the sacred marriage of the aeons served as the model for the Gnostic marriage on earth, for earthly conduct ought to imitate its heavenly models, and the experience of earthly marriage and sexuality were an imitation of the godhead. They thought that the emission of seed by the spiritual men made another pair of aeons take its place among the celestial beings and hastened the coming of the pleroma, the fullness of the divine hierarchy of aeons.¹¹⁶

In this account, the Valentinian Gnostics held the idea that perfect marriage was eschatological. At the end of the world, Achamoth (Wisdom) will enter the Pleroma and receive the Savior as her bridegroom.¹¹⁷ Although the Gospels assert that there is no marrying in heaven, the Valentinians understand that being like angels (Luke 20:36 and parallels) was really marriage.¹¹⁸ Because of the Valentinians' concern with eschatological marriage, they created a rite of initiation which was clearly an anticipation of the spiritual marriage to come. The rite consisted of a spiritual marriage after the likeness of the unions above.¹¹⁹ According to the *Gospel of Philip*, marriage of the Gnostics has become a symbol of the union of spiritual beings. It is not anything fleshly; it is pure and belongs not to lust but to the will.¹²⁰

According to Irenaeus, spiritual marriage was not very spiritual; the Gnostics were often seduced by the women they instructed. "Living with them as brothers and sisters away from their husbands,

they frequently got the sisters pregnant." They were secure in their belief that the spiritual Gnostic had freedom from law; thus, "it is impossible for the spiritual man ever to be corrupted." Continnence and good works may be important for the psychics (the ordinary Christians) but not for the spiritual and perfect. They maintain that "their souls should have every enjoyment of life, so that when they depart, they are deficient of nothing." Given over to the desires of the flesh, they say that they are only repaying to the flesh what belongs to the flesh, and to the spirit what belongs to the spirit.¹²¹

Gnosticism, then, could not have a view of sanctification for marriage as long as it had such an attitude towards matter and body. Both, for the Gnostics, are evil. The human body is subject to the power of the Demiurge and is destined for destruction. According to Nag Hammadi texts, it is the chief archon of the world who created a despicable spirit, in order to pollute the souls leading them into desires for material things, and luring them into sexual union and procreation.¹²² After the serpent "taught (them) to eat from wickedness, procreation, lust, and destruction," the man and woman found themselves bound in traditional marriage. The chief archon "planted sexual desire in her (the soul) who belonged to Adam, and he produced through intercourse the copies of bodies, and he inspired them with his opposing spirit." As a result, "sexual intercourse continued to the present day."¹²³ The Gnostic texts of Nag Hammadi agree that marriage and

procreation, as instigated by archontic powers, have no place in the perfect life. ¹²⁴

While the ascetic Gnostics rejected marriage as an abomination, and forbade it in order to defy the Demiurge, the whole thrust of the libertine was to devalue marriage, to deprive marital relations of any particular purpose, and to value sexual intercourse as an experience but not for marriage and procreation which might follow. ¹²⁵ Gnostics, whether ascetic or libertine, often set the origin of sexuality not in the human situation, as in the Book of Genesis, but within the Godhead as starting with the spiritual realm above. They taught that marriage is evil, and sexual intercourse is of such value that it must be freed from the burden of procreation. When the Valentinians link redemption with the sexual drive and make a ritual of sexual intercourse as a way of entering the Kingdom, and the Carpocratians seek sexual intercourse of all kinds as the condition of salvation, the meaning of marriage seems to have totally disappeared. ¹²⁶ No wonder that some Gnostics of Egypt, as Epiphanius reported, assigned a central place in their religious rites to non-procreative sexual acts. ¹²⁷

Finally, Gnosticism was never interested in ethics and morality. As pneumatic, the Gnostics believed that they would be saved, not by means of conduct, but because they were spiritual by nature. All ethical and moral considerations were pushed aside in the interest of the emancipation of the spirit from the enslavement of matter; a chemical rather

than an ethical process. Moreover, their ethical conduct was never uniform. Some demanded strict abstinence, while others thought that flesh could be mortified only by excessive gratification. Fornication, however, is not unusual in Gnostic thought. The angels committed fornication with women to create the world; and the chief archon sent his angels to the daughters of men to "raise offspring for their enjoyment." ¹²⁸

I.4 MANICHAISM

The Manichees repeated the same condemnation of marriage. Manichaeism is the last powerful manifestation of Gnostic religion in the ancient world. Mani, its founder, ¹²⁹ writes, "The truths and secrets I proclaimed were the truths of Gnosticism brought together into a synthesis and announced to humankind as revealed truth." ¹³⁰ Therefore, It is suggested that Manichaeism had largely absorbed the Gnostics and Marcionites of the early Christian centuries. ¹³¹ Origen debated with a certain bishop, Heracleides, that Gnosticism was about to reappear in a new guise as a rival universal religion molded by a genius Mani ¹³². Athanasius, too, repeatedly mentions Mani together with Marcion and Valentinus as schismatic groups. ¹³³

Manichaeism entered Egypt very early. We could say that Egypt was among the earliest Manichaean centers. ¹³⁴ It appears to have been established in Egypt before the end of the third century by Manichaean missionaries. ¹³⁵ Probably they were arriving in Egypt via Syria which was the bridgehead of Manichaeism in the Roman world. ¹³⁶ The sect spread rapidly and found in Egypt a particularly firm base which was developed into a propaganda center for the Mediterranean countries. ¹³⁷ From Egypt it spread across North Africa before the end of the third century. The acceptance of Manichaeism by St. Augustine from 373-382 A.D.

points to the importance Manichaeism held at the end of the fourth century. ¹³⁸

Manichaean asceticism was seen by the Church of Egypt as a dangerous perversion of an exalted form of Christian living. Thus, a circular letter was issued and composed around 300 A.D. by the Bishop of Alexandria himself, probably, Theonas, Patriarch of Alexandria from 288-300. The author denounced the Manichaean asceticism in his time, and "repeated the dubious slander that the sect drank the menstrual blood of its female participants in order to maintain its immortality." ¹³⁹ Athanasius' writings reveal a vigorous attack upon Manichaeism. ¹⁴⁰

In addition, the very early success of the Manichaean mission in Egypt aroused Egyptian authors to counter-measures. The Platonist philosopher Alexander of Lycopolis attempted to refute Manichaeism in his treatise *Critique of the Doctrines of Manichaeus*. ¹⁴¹ The work of Bishop Serapion of Thmuis, a town in Lower Egypt, represents also an achievement against the Manichees. He criticizes the main points, specially their dualistic theory of a good and a bad first principle, and their objections to the Old Testament and certain parts of the New. ¹⁴² In many of his writings, Didymus of Alexandria (c. 313 - 398) attacked Manichaeism, and in addition, he is the author of a short treatise *Against the Manichaeans*.

Manichaeism took, in Egypt, a somewhat special character. Egyptian Manichaeans of the fourth century, as well as the western Manichaeans in general, were much more "Christian" than those of the East. Although the religion of the historical Christ was objectionable, Christ was admitted by the western Manichees to a high role, and "the name of Jesus was always in their mouths." ¹⁴⁴

The Manichaean community was divided into the "elect" and the "hearers," and there were special commandments for each according to their capacities. The hearers, or the catechumens, supported the elect by works and alms, hoping to be reincarnated in the body of an elect, and then to attain salvation. ¹⁴⁵

Manichaeism fundamentally believed that there were two principles: Light and Darkness. A Manichaean handbook states:

Everyone who wishes to join the sect must know that Light and Darkness are principles each in their own right, and that their own natures are completely distinct. If he does not perceive this, how will he be able to practice religion? ¹⁴⁶

This is the foundation of Manichaeism with which all its accounts begin. It maintains:

Before the existence of heaven and earth and everything in them, there were two natures, the one good and the other evil. Both are separate from each other. The good principle dwells in the place of Light and is called "Father of Greatness" . . . The evil principle is called "King of Darkness", and dwells in his land of Darkness. ¹⁴⁷

Light and Darkness then were intermingled at the outset of creation; and the visible universe was a chaotic mixture in which the darkness held the light in a suffocating embrace. For Mani, Darkness was an active force which "passionately desired and ate the Light." There was Light in all creation; in vegetables, in animals, as well as in humans. Adam and Eve were created by the King of Darkness, having in themselves "all the Light left at his disposal." "This procreation is described with much repulsive circumstances, involving copulations between the male and female demons and the devouring of the progeny by their king." ¹⁴⁸ Adam was "weighed down by his infernal flesh," as created by demons. Therefore, when he realized "the divine origins of his soul and the wretched state of his body," he cried "Woe, woe to the maker of my body, and to the one who has held my soul in bondage, and the rebels who have enslaved me." This is why Jesus came to free Adam from his servitude to matter, and to teach him the knowledge of righteousness. ¹⁴⁹

Thus, according to Manichaeism, the human body is of devilish substance as well as of devilish design. "Here the Manichaean hostility to body and sex, with its vast ascetic consequences, is provided with a mythological foundation." Eve was created to be the instrument of demons to seduce Adam "not only to carnal lust but through it to procreation, the most formidable device in Satan's strategy." This would "prolong the captivity of Light," and "so disperse the Light as to render indefinitely more difficult the work of salvation." ¹⁵⁰

The center of Manichaean morality is to urge man "to rescue the Light imprisoned in him and in the world" by eating bread, vegetables, or fruit containing seeds. "The release of light also could be affected or impeded by sexual actions." Mani taught in *The Fundamental Epistle* that as the first human beings were generated by the Prince of Darkness, so "we see the nature of evil becomes the framer of bodies, deriving from bodies the generative forces to fashion them." ¹⁵¹ Procreation for him is the evil act of evil.

Manichaeism, then, had no sanctified regard to body as well as to marriage. It claims that virtue comes from the soul, and is not transmitted to the body, even when a good deed is performed by the body as the instrument of the soul. ¹⁵² The human body, for them, is intrinsically evil and cannot be the creation of a good god. Therefore they, like the Gnostics, denied that the Lord Jesus came in a body. They claim that it was the Church which formulated

doctrines, as for example, the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth, and framed them as essential articles of faith, while Christ Himself never made such statements.¹⁵³

The analysis of humans by Manichaeism, as beings composed of light particles in an evil body, originally generated by demons, determined its view toward sex and marriage. Eve was created as an instrument of demons to seduce Adam to carnal lust, and through it to reproduction, the device of Satan.¹⁵⁴ The great war between the forces of good and evil was characterized by the attempt of the Prince of Darkness to spread evil throughout the world by means of procreation, that is, by the creation of more and more corporeal prisons to entrap the elements of light.¹⁵⁵ Thus, marriage is an evil device of the Evil One.

Strict observation of Manichaean precepts would result in the eventual extinction of the human race. Alexander of Lycopolis records their chief tenets as follows:

Since it is God's decree that matter shall perish, one has to abstain from eating any animals, and should rather eat vegetables and all the other things that are without feeling. One has to abstain from marriage and love-making and the begetting of children, lest, because of the succession of the race, the power

should dwell in matter for a longer time.¹⁵⁶

Finally, while the Elect were required to abstain from marriage, the Hearers were allowed to marry or to have mistresses, but were advised to avoid procreation.¹⁵⁷ The Elect could be saved because sexual urge had been banished from themselves.¹⁵⁸

I.5 STOICISM

While Gnosticism and Manichaeism are dualistic, Stoicism is monistic and a thorough-going materialistic system. It does not oppose matter to spirit, for spirit is a subtle kind of matter. ¹⁵⁹

Stoicism is a Graeco-Roman school of philosophy, founded at Athens by Zeno. ¹⁶⁰ His followers became known as Stoics, a name derived from the beautiful colonnaded porch (Stoa) in Athens, where Zeno gave his lectures. The movement extended over the three centuries before Christ and the first three centuries of Christianity. It succeeded in attracting a great number of learned and aristocratic people and reached all great cities of Asia Minor and Egypt ¹⁶¹. The later Stoicism became more and more a practical philosophy and a way of life; its ethics had a wide influence in the Graeco-Roman world. ¹⁶² Stoic sources are extensively used in the Alexandrians Clement and Origen; and the high moral standards of the Stoics made them appeal to Christianity more than to any sort of paganism. Stoicism affected Christianity, and its teaching had remained influential in "the air which the intellectual converts to Christianity breathed," long time after Stoicism had perished. ¹⁶³

Stoicism held that "there are two principles in the universe, the passive principle and the active. The passive principle is a substance without quality, i.e. matter, whereas the active is the Logos inherent in this substance, that is God." ¹⁶⁴ However, matter

never exists alone for it is body. Every thing then, since it is material, is also in a certain way undetermined, i.e., without quality. When acted upon, it can become various things, but it must be acted upon, for it needs the active principle to become some real thing.¹⁶⁵

Humans, for the Stoics, are a part of this cosmic system; and the soul, which is part of the soul of the universe, is a spark of fire. Their interest in nature is related to their interest in ethics; and to live "according to nature" is the phrase, often repeated by them, which sums up their ethical ideal. They believed in the law of nature and the law of conscience and duty. To the Stoics, the wisdom of the wise man consists in conformity to nature, i.e., in living according to the law of the universe embodied in the divine Logos. The majesty and power of the natural law are emphasized in Chrysippus as follows:

The natural law is king over everything, divine and human alike. It must be the authority that determines what is good and what is evil, the leader of men destined to live in communities. It lays down standards for right and wrong, and it does so by commanding what is to be done and forbidding what is not to be done.¹⁶⁶

The Stoic accepts the universe and attempts to discipline his life into conformity with what his reason tells him is nature's intention. He cannot change nature, except in minor details, but he can change himself.¹⁶⁷ Living virtuously, as Chrysippus says in the first book of his *About Ends*, is equivalent to living in accordance with the experience of the actual course of nature; for our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe.¹⁶⁸

To live according to nature is, for the Stoic, to distrust the emotions as being merely erroneous opinions. Every passion is irrational and evil. The wise man aims constantly to extirpate passion. Ascetic effort is necessary if one is to attain an untroubled state of soul. Apathy can be attained solely in the life of reason in which one lives in accord with one's rational nature. Affections, emotions, and passions are to be controlled.¹⁶⁹

Three different meanings of the word "nature" can be observed in the Stoic concept of sexuality. First, it appears in the comparison between the sexual process and the sowing of a field. A second meaning appears in the importance attached to animal behavior. What animals do is natural, a notion occurring especially in Seneca. Thirdly, nature could be discerned in the human body, notably through observing what particular organs did. The analysis of the natural function of the organ was isolated from a consideration of the organ in relation to the person as a whole.¹⁷⁰

The Stoics sought to control bodily desires by reason. Epictetus considered immoderateness in bodily activities irrational, for it made one dependent on one's body.¹⁷¹ As passion in marriage was condemned, marriage must have another basis. Plainly that basis was its necessary part in procreation. According to this rational purposefulness, excess in marital intercourse might be measured. Ocellus Lucanus, one of the later Stoics, in his *Universal Nature*, 4, formulated a thesis that became axiomatic among some Christian fathers, "Not for the sake of pleasure do we approach one another, but in order to create children."¹⁷²

The clearest formulation of Stoic marital doctrine is made by Musonius Rufus. He writes, "Whoever destroys human marriage destroys the home, the city, and the whole human race. For it would not last if there were no procreation of children, and there would be no just and lawful procreation of children without marriage."¹⁷³ Musonius held that marital intercourse was morally right only if its purpose was procreative. His doctrine joined the Stoic distrust of emotions and pleasure to the insistence on purpose. Seneca too proclaimed that affection, even to one's own wife, is shameful. "A wise man ought to love his wife with judgment not affection." Husbands were called to follow the nature of beasts, not to have intercourse with their wives in pregnancy. He advises, "Let them show themselves to their wives not as lovers, but as husbands."¹⁷⁴

Marriage and sexuality are, for the Stoics, meant by nature to serve the larger society, the state, considering that humans are political animals by nature. In his *Discourses*, I. 23, Epictetus says, "We understand that we are by nature social beings". Diogenes Laertius, in his *Lives and Opinions*, I.23, announces, "The excellent man will not live in solitude; he is by nature a being of community, and inclined to human transaction." Cicero had said the same thing: "From the fact that no one would choose to live in solitude, even though it contained an endless abundance of pleasure, we easily understand that we have been born for the coming together and joining of mankind, and of sharing that is natural." ¹⁷⁵

It is noticeable that Zeno regards one of the main sources of social conflict to be institution of the family, and puts forward startling views on sexual relations. His proposal for the ideal society is called "community of wives," or "freedom of intercourse between the sexes." It implies complete promiscuity; and the ground for this is stated by Diogenes Laertius (VII. 131): "We shall then have fatherly affection for all children alike, and there will be an end to jealousy arising from adultery." For the same reason, Zeno allowed homosexual relationships in the Ideal Community: "The wise man will love boys whose physical beauty shows the goodness innate in their character (Diogenes Laertius VII. 129)." ¹⁷⁶

Chrysippus emphasized the theory of Zeno's Utopia; thus we find the same argument that incest

is not necessarily to be rejected, that women are to be "in common" in the kingdom of the wise, and that there is nothing immoral about eating human flesh. Chrysippus, like Zeno, combined the doctrine of women "in common" with advocating a marriage by consent of the parties and a contempt for the mere conventions of city life. ¹⁷⁷

Now, what does Stoicism think of marriage in relation to sanctification? In theory, the Stoics considered the body as, in a way, divine, since the divine Logos pervades everything; but in fact, the body is not honored as divine. It is the soul not the body that is of such importance; therefore Stoicism taught that there must be no delicate scruples as to the burning or burying of the dead. ¹⁷⁸ Moreover, one may resort to suicide when pain becomes unbearable. ¹⁷⁹

Stoicism, however, allowed marriage. In the *Politeia*, the view is attributed to Zeno that the wise man will marry and have children. ¹⁸⁰ This is the Stoic's duty to the community and his fatherland. It is his duty to nature, considering that the eternity of the species is the eternity of mankind. ¹⁸¹ Also, Stoicism recognizes the full equality of husband and wife, considering that men and women have one virtue, and that "beyond and above the manly virtues, there are human virtues which are valid for both men and women." ¹⁸²

Nevertheless, the prevailing doctrine in the circles of the Stoics favored the restriction of sexual

activity by rules of reason appealing to nature. They found in the biological function the purpose for sexual relations. Insisting that marriage should happen only "according to nature," they held that intercourse was supposed to take place only for the propagation of the human race and providing the country with new citizens.¹⁸³ Avoiding affection and dependence, they excluded the expression of love as a purpose. For them, "the supreme norm was not love but nature."¹⁸⁴ Every passion is evil, and love of husband and wife is shameful. However, husband and wife could make love only in order to have children; and even then, with care not to indulge in too many caresses. All other forms of lovemaking were gratuitous acts.¹⁸⁵

Marriage, then, is not honored in itself but applied to the service of nature. The sexual process is an imitation of plants and animals; it has its purpose in procreation for the benefit of the state. In turn, to serve the state is to follow nature. The Stoics agreed with Aristotle's aphorism mentioned in his *Politics* I.2, "It is evident that the state is a creation of nature, and that man is by nature a political animal."¹⁸⁶

In addition, Stoicism showed marriage for the wise men as a freely chosen relationship. Such a relationship will rise out of the nature of the wise and, as Zeno asserts, from the erotic side of their personality. Although love is directed to friendship, freedom is the preparer of concord; and physical satisfaction will certainly be enjoyed. If some things are to be preferred, even if they cannot be

justified as in themselves moral, there must be another justification for this preference. That justification is proved for Zeno by the theory that everything preferred is natural.¹⁸⁷ Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 121-180) says, "Nothing that is according to nature can be evil."¹⁸⁸ Therefore, homosexuality and incest are permissible if they are preferred.¹⁸⁹ The wise man, as discussed earlier, may love boys to enjoy their physical bodies;¹⁹⁰ and the doctrine of women "in common", is an expression of the freely chosen partnerships of the wise.¹⁹¹

I.6 NEOPLATONISM

In the first half of the third century, Neoplatonism appeared as a new intellectual movement. Its center was Alexandria. From the time when the Alexandrian School rose into prominence, the official Academy at Athens fell into insignificance. The system soon spread to Rome and the rest of the Empire. By the early fifth century, it gained a firm footing at Athens until the Academy was closed by the edict of Justinian in 529 A.D.¹⁹²

Neoplatonism was established as a school of thought by Plotinus (205-270 A.D.), the Greek-speaking Egyptian who was its founder and also one of the greatest thinkers of the ancient world.¹⁹³ The chief documents of Neoplatonism are the "Enneads" of Plotinus, a series of fifty-four essays arranged into six divisions of nine each.¹⁹⁴ Among the most outstanding representatives of Neoplatonism after Plotinus were Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus.¹⁹⁵

The system did not have the widespread appeal of the Oriental mystery religions, but it appealed to those minds who sought for a naturalistic and rationalistic form of contemplation and piety.¹⁹⁶ It is remarkable that Neoplatonism did not create an independent religious community. The answer, for Harnack, is that it lacked three elements, described by Augustine in his *Confessions* (V11. 18-21), to give it the significance of a religious system. It lacked a religious founder,

it was unable to explain how one could permanently maintain the mood of blessedness and peace, and it lacked the means of winning the "people" who could not learn the philosophic exercises and speculations which it recommended for attaining the highest good. Neoplatonists, however, separated their pagan philosophical doctrine from pagan worship. Around the third century A. D., the goal of philosophical life and of philosophy itself became more religious. The task of the philosopher was to guide his followers to the experience of the divine without drawing conclusions from religious myths and oracles. After Plotinus, Neoplatonism became less a philosophy than a religion, whose followers were occupied, like their Christian counterparts, in expounding sacred texts.¹⁹⁷

From the third to the sixth century, Neoplatonism provided a center of opposition to Christian doctrine.¹⁹⁸ The conflict between pagan philosophy and Christianity, which began in the second century with the anti-Christian treatise of the Platonist Celsus, continued with Porphyry's fourth-century treatise "Against the Christians."¹⁹⁹ Neoplatonism was almost defeated in this conflict.²⁰⁰ Even before the Council of Nicaea, Constantine ordered the destruction of the "godless writing" of Porphyry, "the enemy of true piety."²⁰¹ Emperor Theodosius II in 448 A.D. again ordered the burning of all Porphyry's writings.²⁰² Although Neoplatonism was generally antagonistic to Christianity, it exercised a great influence on many Christian thinkers.²⁰³ However, the Christians who drew from the Plotinian tradition in order to

formulate their spirituality, to a great extent did no more than take back what belonged to them.²⁰⁴

Plotinus, on the hand, was bothered by Plato's dichotomies.²⁰⁵ He also attacked Gnosticism; Porphyry reports in his *Life of Plotinus* that he wrote a treatise to which Porphyry gave the title "Against the Gnostics."²⁰⁶ Moreover, in his treatise, "On Providence," he writes, "No one therefore may find fault with our universe on the ground that it is not beautiful or not the most perfect of the beings associated by the body."²⁰⁷ On the other hand, some texts in the Nag Hammadi library seem more Neoplatonic in orientation than Christian or Jewish.²⁰⁸ We also know from Plotinus' writing against the Gnostics that some of his own circles had adopted Gnostic teaching. Porphyry mentions the titles of several writings read by these people.²⁰⁹

Actually, Neoplatonism rejects the doctrine of matter as a principle of evil independent of the source of being and goodness.²¹⁰ Plotinus holds an optimistic attitude to the universe; material though it is, the world is good in his eyes as created and ordered by the higher soul.²¹¹ Nevertheless, Plotinus restores evil to a real place in the sensible world by arguing that evil must have an existence independent of good.²¹² He sought to establish the spiritual nature of reality, showing the immaterial ground of both spiritual and material things.²¹³ That which is taken to be material is, for him, Soul in its lowest possible level of being. All individual souls are emanations from the World-Soul, and, like it, they have a higher element which is related to

mind, and a lower element which is directly connected with the body. Matter in itself, that is, unilluminated by form, is darkness or non-being and as such is evil. Although the visible universe reflects the intelligible order, and as such should be accepted as the best of all possible world's matter, as the principle of negation and darkness, is the principle of evil. It resists the activity of the informing Soul.²¹⁴ Therefore, the Neoplatonists opposed the Christian doctrine of the incarnation and the resurrection of the body.²¹⁵

The goal of human life, according to Neoplatonism, is the divinization of the soul. "The true philosopher", writes Porphyry in his *On Abstinence* II.49, "is a priest of the supreme God, and by his abstinence he is united to the god he serves."²¹⁶ The human soul possesses a faculty of reasoning by which it can distance itself from bodies and ascend towards Mind. It also has lower faculties by which it organizes the body.²¹⁷ The human soul or mind has the power of contemplation by which it can ascend higher to the One in ecstasy. It is by ascetic restraint that the soul can ascend to its fulfillment and experience "flight from the body," the "flight from the alone to the Alone." The first stage of ascent consists in a process of purification in which the soul is radically separated from materiality and freed from the body. At the second stage, it rises to the level of mind. The final stage consists in mystical union with the One, and is mediated by ecstasy. In this life, the state of ecstasy is rarely, if ever, attained.²¹⁸

Neoplatonism, as such, insufficiently appreciates the body and the material world. The tension and suffering present in the world are natural as a simple and necessary consequence of embodiment.²¹⁹ Plotinus did not hold a sanctified view of his body; on the contrary, Porphyry records in his *Life of Plotinus* (I.1-2) that his master "seemed ashamed of being in the body."²²⁰ The goal of the Neoplatonist, as we have seen, is the divinization of the soul; the body then is not involved; and to achieve purity, the soul has to distance itself from the body. Consequently, marriage is not well valued. Porphyry's well known *Letter to Marcella* uncovers the Neoplatonic attitude of marriage. He advises, "Do not occupy yourself with the body; do not see yourself as a woman, since I no longer hold you as such. Flee in the spirit from everything feminine as if you had a male body."²²¹

However, the general Neoplatonic attitude to marriage was nonetheless opposed to that of Manichaeism. Like the Stoics and most moralists of late antiquity, the common ground was that sexual relations have value only for procreation.²²² Plotinus considers love as more perfect when it does not aim at procreation, since such an aim indicates dissatisfaction with one's present condition. For him, to direct one's energies outwards is to dissipate them.²²³

I.7 ROMAN LAW

It is convenient for this thesis to discuss marriage with respect to Roman law, especially since it is evident that the Christian Church, both at the time of persecution and during her alliance with the Roman State, had accepted the Roman laws regulating marriage. Evidently, when a pagan convert embraced Christianity, he or she was already bound by the prohibitions introduced by the Roman law with respect to marriage. After his conversion, he or she was still bound by them, as being the law of the land and not contrary to his Christian conscience ²²⁴. However, marriage regulations of the Roman law may represent the view of the Greek and Roman populations in Egypt at the time of Athanasius, as being the law of the civilized world.

Marriage was established as a civil law type of marriage from an early date, and this type was common by the second century B.C. Its celebration had almost no effect on the legal condition of the parties. The law had very little to say about its creation and termination. It was considered a private act which did not require the sanction of any public authority. All that was required for a valid marriage was the capacity to marry, freedom from barriers of consanguinity or affinity, and a manifestation of a common intention to be married. The whole procedure was quite informal; no written document was necessary, only a contract for the bride's dowry, if she had one. Nevertheless, an

elaborate ceremonial of the bridal procession and feasting was, however, usual to show that marriage and not concubinage was intended.²²⁵

Marriage was conceived as an agreement between two freely choosing parties. It was an option for the woman; that is, once she had reached the legally marriageable age of twelve years, a girl could declare herself *sui iuris*, a legally free woman. She could betroth herself to and marry whom she chose, and then remained a free person. She did not pass into the *potestas* of her husband, and her estate remained her own. The Roman Society enjoyed monogamous marriage, even though concubinage was common. In 285 A.D., Diocletian prohibited polygamy for all his subjects.²²⁶ Close relationship was a bar to marriage; for example, an uncle and niece and great uncle and great niece could not intermarry. From at least the time of Augustus, the minimum age of marriage for a girl was twelve, and for a boy was fourteen, the normal age at which the necessary physical faculties are developed. Thence, one who could not have them, like a castrated man, could not marry.²²⁷

The essence of marriage lies in the consent which gives meaning and legal substance to the marriage agreement. The parties must be capable of consent, and thus a lunatic could not marry. The *consensus* is essential while *concubitus* is not. The principle of Roman law announces that "marriage is not in the intercourse but in the consent" (*nuptias non concubitus, sed consensus facit*). Modestinus mentions definitely that "cohabitation with a free

woman is marriage and not concubinage." This concept presupposed that a slave woman could not give her free consent, and that cohabitation with her could not be marriage ²²⁸. Thus the law denied *connubium* to slaves and recognized only *contubernium* between them, a kind of legitimized concubinage. The children born were illegitimate. Since their parents could own no property, the children of slaves could inherit none. Female slaves were kept in the households to help serve the sexual needs of the male head of the house and of his sons; a duty to which they were expected to put up no resistance. Slaves, however, lived in sexual promiscuity, except for few of them who acted as stewards for their masters, or served the emperor and the state as functionaries. ²²⁹

Thus, the Roman law denied the possibility of *marriage* between citizens and slaves. Marriage was also forbidden between freed slaves and their erstwhile owners, and between citizens of patrician rank and freedmen ²³⁰. Roman citizens were forbidden to marry foreigners; sexual liaison with them was permitted. Marriage, however, differed from a merely casual liaison in the existence of an intention both to enter into a permanent union and to give it the legal consequence of marriage. In some cases, particularly in that of a union between a patron and his freed woman, concubinage remained simply an alternative to marriage, but in general, there was no legal reason why a man should not have a wife and one or more concubines. ²³¹

Because of the predominance of the free marriage and the reluctance of the Roman law to specify any form of marital consent, such kinds of contract in this marriage were non-existent. Actually, there was nothing to distinguish marriage from concubinage except the *maritalis affectio*, the desire and the will of the parties to be married; and this was usually indicated by a provision for dowry.²³² However, in the late Empire, it became common to draw up marriage settlements with detailed provisions concerning dowry and antenuptual gifts.²³³

The subjects of the contract were only the parties involved; marriage did not need any third party to give it legal validity. The state provided facilities for the registration of marriage agreements which implied control over their conformity with the laws.²³⁴ Nevertheless, the Roman law did not define how a marriage was to be solemnized. There were, of course, social ceremonies which customarily accompanied a marriage, but none of these ceremonies was legally necessary. As the consent was expressed, the parties involved were free to follow their customs and traditions. Any secular or religious ceremony surrounding the consent was expressly placed outside the law's requirements for validity, except in that they signified the presence of the consent which distinguished marriage from concubinage.²³⁵

Roman law, like the Mosaic law, provided for the possibility of dissolving marriage. A virtuous but sterile wife could be divorced. Since marriage

depended merely on the parties' living together with the intention of marriage, it could equally be ended by the free will of either or both. Divorce, from a legal viewpoint, was as easy for the wife as for the husband and as informal as marriage. As no formality was needed for the beginning of a marriage, so also none was needed for its termination. The idea is that what had been created by agreement could be dissolved by contrary agreement or by disagreement. The spouses needed to prove no grounds to dissolve their marriage. They needed only to withdraw their *maritalis affectio*.²³⁶ However, as we hear of customary words and ceremonies at the beginning of a marriage, we hear also of the uttering of customary words or the sending of a document, but none of these was legally necessary.²³⁷ The traditional Roman custom had been to accept divorce and subsequent remarriage by the mutual consent of both partners. A one-sided divorce was no more difficult. If a husband desired divorce without cause, he had to return the whole dowry; while in the case of a woman initiating action without cause, a good portion of her dowry was withheld from her.²³⁸

With the advent of Christian emperors, a radical change in the attitude of the Roman law might have been expected. In fact, neither Constantine nor his successors attempted to impose the Christian rule of marriage on their subjects by legislative enactments. Ancient institutions cannot be swept away in a day. The empire embraced within its borders a very heterogeneous population,

many of whom evidently did not live up to the new teaching. Thus, a legal divorce continued to be open to all. Even the most forcefully Christian Emperors did not uproot the old law, but attempted to restrict its application by imposing severe penalties on divorce by either party unless for a reason recognized by the legislator.²³⁹

The first important changes were made by Constantine. His law of 311 A.D. intended to restrict divorce to certain specified grounds of a grave character; and severe penalties were imposed on any who should effect a divorce for some other reason.²⁴⁰ His decree of January 31, 320 A.D., terminated the Augustan legal disadvantage suffered by unmarried or childless persons. Exception was made only for the continuation of restriction on inheritance by childless couples. To encourage those living in concubinage to marry, Constantine enacted that such a marriage should legitimate any children already born. The legitimization of marriage of the father with the free-born mother should be facilitated; but the union of a lady with her slave was forbidden by Constantine under penalty of death to both parties. More fearful threats were made against abductors and their companions in crime. At the same time, the state gave assistance to poor parents in order that they need not abandon their children.²⁴¹

The Roman law, however, lacked the sense of sanctification of marriage. Adultery was regarded merely as an infringement of the husband's rights, as an attack on his property. The husband was

permitted to kill his guilty wife and the man with whom she committed the crime. If he preferred not to avenge his honor, he had the right of accusing his wife. This right was not possessed by the woman who could not make a complaint against her husband if he violated conjugal fidelity. Violation and rape were punished as lightly as adultery. It was only an outrage of the property of the girl's father, and perfectly repaired by marriage.²⁴²

The final result of these legal dispositions as to the relationship of woman to man was the weakening of the moral sense of sex. In the Augustan age, concubinage was publicly tolerated and regulated by the law.²⁴³ The public prostitutes were the only persons branded with infamy. To diminish their numbers, Domitian deprived them of the right of inheriting or receiving a legacy. Free women, belonging to noble families, might put their names among the public prostitutes in order not to be punished for adultery. This was forbidden under Tiberius, but only to ladies of the equestrian order.²⁴⁴ The ease of divorce increased corruption. In theory, marriage under the Roman law was understood to be a stable and lasting relationship, but in practice, marriages were terminated easily, and women requested it as often as men²⁴⁵. In freeing herself from the ancient obligations, the woman also emancipated herself from the laws of morality.²⁴⁶ On the other hand, while the husband was permitted to divorce his wife on the ground of adultery, no corresponding right was accorded to the wife.²⁴⁷ However, an attempt was made by Constantine to increase the sense of the sacredness

of marriage by reducing the number of divorces, which could be punished with exile. ²⁴⁸

The purpose of marriage, according to Roman law, was the procreation of children. The Empire's population was in a serious decline at the beginning of the Christian era. That was why Augustus issued his decree to penalize those who remained celibate and to reward those who had several offspring. ²⁴⁹ Most probably that was one of the reasons why the Manichees were viewed as a menace by the Roman empire. ²⁵⁰ Consequently, as marriage was regarded simply as a political institution, it produced, besides the degradation of woman, laws against celibacy and contempt for widowhood. The husband might preserve his wife from widowhood by leaving her in his will to a friend who would receive her as a legacy. ²⁵¹ In the early times of the Roman Republic, widows were freed from some taxes; but when penalties were inflicted for celibacy, this exemption was changed. Indeed, this strange law against celibacy is surprising, for it means that there was no respect even for personal freedom or for the institution of marriage itself. It is important to mention that Tiberius had amended the Lex Julia et Pappaea to prohibit men over sixty from marrying. ²⁵² If the conjugal union is directed to the interest of the State, then the State will attach the greatest importance to marriage. It seems that the abrogation of the laws inimical to celibacy, and the attempts made to limit the grounds for divorce, were put forth under Christian inspiration. ²⁵³

I.8 CONCLUDING REMARKS

These conflicting views on marriage formed the non-Christian ideas which the Bishop of Alexandria faced. They influenced the Christians of that time to develop their own attitude. No doubt, Egyptian writers recognized and reacted to such views, retaining some elements and refuting the others. Of course, they welcomed some views of their ancestors, the old Egyptians, who held a high regard for sexual morality. The religious character portrayed through the presence of the priest helped in viewing marriage as being a sanctified institution. In addition, the Judaic viewpoint of marriage as a divine ordinance had a considerable impact, as much as Judaism itself is considered a divine heritage, by which means the Old Testament is also included in the Christian Scripture.

It is probable that the old Egyptian inclination to asceticism paved the way to the diffusion of Gnostic and Manichaeian Encratites. Nevertheless, their attitude was seen by Athanasius as dangerous for Christian asceticism to the extent that he endeavored to assert that there was no relation between both.²⁵⁴ The dualistic view was behind non-Christian asceticism, even with those who allowed marriage. Neoplatonists, for instance, saw that the goal of human life is the divinization of the soul, and the presence of suffering in the world is a necessary consequence of embodiment. Both Neoplatonists and Stoics held that the union of marriage might be directed exclusively to the

purpose of raising children for the benefit of the State. These ideas influenced Christian writers as well as Roman law.

Finally, the purpose of procreation probably made it easy for marriage to be terminated, and was a motivation for allowing concubinage and issuing decrees against celibacy and childless marriages. The Stoic idea of imitating nature justified incest and homosexuality. There was no social hindrance for cohabiting with prostitutes, slaves and boys.²⁵⁵ If this was so, what was the contribution of Egyptian Christianity before Athanasius?

Chapter II

CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TO MARRIAGE

BEFORE ATHANASIUS

At the beginning of the second century, Christianity spread to the native population of the Nile Valley. ¹ There were gentile Christians as well as Jewish Christians. ² The Jewish converts to Christianity continued to be bound by the Mosaic law of marriage, except as far as any of the Mosaic regulations had been abrogated or modified by Christianity. The rule of monogamy was restored, and divorce was disallowed except upon the single ground of adultery. Christians should marry none but Christians, and the laws commanding the levirate marriage were abrogated. When the gentile convert embraced Christianity, he was still bound by the Roman law of marriage in addition to the modified Mosaic law. ³

Marriage suffered most because of the growing tendency to self denial; martyrdom being the supreme example. The continuation of persecution and the bravery of Christians in facing it motivated the spirit of renunciation of

the world. We have the testimony of Galen, the medical writer who was struck by the bravery and sexual austerity of the Christian communities. He writes of them as follows: "Their contempt of death is patent to us every day, and likewise their restraint in cohabitation, for they include not only men but also women who refrain from cohabiting all through their lives." ⁴

Clement of Alexandria warns of the danger of allowing family ties to override the duties connected with the Christian profession. ⁵ Leonides, from a provincial town in Egypt and the father of seven children, had been executed by the Augustal prefect. His child, the young Origen, had written to him not to be swayed by anxiety for his family. ⁶ Dionysius of Alexandria teaches that Christians must look at family obligations, real as they are, as to be of minor importance when they come into conflict with the claims of the Christian faith. ⁷

Alongside martyrdom, there were certain ascetic tendencies which pushed sexual rigorism to the extreme of the forbidding of marriage. ⁸ When Christianity came to Egypt, it found minds accustomed to regarding asceticism as the highest ideal. ⁹ It is not without significance that a Christian, contemporary of Galen, actually petitioned, but without success, the Augustal prefect of Alexandria for permission to go to the length of self castration, for only by undergoing such a drastic operation could he hope to convince his contemporary pagans that indiscriminate intercourse was not what Christian men sought in their "sisters."¹⁰ Origen, according to Eusebius, castrated himself

while little more than a boy.¹¹ However, we find Christian legislation against the practice, but actually from the middle of the third century, the ascetic views took a firm hold on the Christian Church of Egypt and became the dominant attitude.¹²

At the same time, a close relationship was maintained between the churches of different countries. The ascetic literature and practice of neighbor lands could not be without influence upon Christians of such a cosmopolitan city as Alexandria, and a major country like Egypt.¹³ Consequently, the Encratism of Tatian¹⁴, the Montanism of North Africa¹⁵, and the ascetic tendency of the Syriac speaking Church left particular effect upon the Church of Alexandria which was so situated as to be open to the influence of the Church in countries around the Mediterranean.¹⁶ Similar tendencies were pressed by Gnostics, Marcionites and Manichees. Their own apocryphal books, as well as their particular interpretation of the New Testament, increased the prevalence of disparagement of life and specifically of marriage.¹⁷

Clement

The Fathers of the Church thereupon rallied to the defense of marriage. At the end of the second book of his *Stromata*, Clement of Alexandria gives a short survey of what pagan philosophers thought of marriage, and the third book is entirely concerned with the refutation of Encratism, partly on the basis on Genesis 1:28, and partly on more

secular and philosophical grounds, namely the maintenance of one's country and the perfection of one's self and of the world ¹⁸. He says that marriage is good for it is the invention of the one good God. "If marriage according to the law is sin, I do not know how anyone can say he knows God when he asserts that the command of God is sin. If the law is holy, marriage is holy." For Clement, those who consider the lower parts of man's body as indicating inferior workmanship that caused a sexual impulse, they "fail to observe that the upper parts also want food and in some men are lustful." ¹⁹

Tatian regards marriage as on the same level as fornication, and Clement speaks of his repudiation of marriage, and mentions his work (now lost) *On Perfection According to the Savior*. ²⁰ To the claim that the Lord did not marry, making marriage inappropriate for Christians, Clement answers, "In the first place He had His own bride, the Church, and in the next place He was no ordinary man that He should also be in need of some helpmate (Gen. 2:18) after the flesh. Nor was it necessary for Him to beget children, since He abides eternally and was born the only Son of God." ²¹ Clement gives the title of Antichrist to those who "under a pious cloak blaspheme by their continence both the creation and the holy Creator... and teach that one must reject marriage and begetting of children, and should not bring others in their place to live in this wretched world." ²² The heretics who teach that Christ's body was "psychic" are blasphemers, because "they say that the Lord who shared in birth was born in evil, and that the Virgin gave birth to Him in evil." ²³

At the same time, he assaults the sexual permissiveness of Carpocrates (and Epiphanes) who taught that wives should be "common property."²⁴ He exclaims, "How can this man still be reckoned among our number when he openly abolishes both law and Gospel?"²⁵ About the Carpocratians he cries, "These thrice wretched men treat carnal and sexual intercourse as a sacred religious mystery, and think that it will bring them to the kingdom of God."²⁶ For Clement, their idea is close to the Valentinians who suggest that sexuality is valuable in itself as an experience that cooperates in completing the *pleroma* of the universe. Thus he confirms the Christian tradition that marriage is good, and sexuality is to be kept within marriage.²⁷

Marriage was given a positive evaluation as the creation of the beneficent Creator.²⁸ Clement believes that the best text blessing marriage is the saying of the Lord, "Where two or three are gathered together for my sake, there I am in the midst of them" (Matt. 18:20). Clement asks, "Who are the two or three gathered in the name of Christ in whose midst the Lord is? Does He not by the 'three' mean husband, wife, and child?"²⁹ He quotes St. Paul (I Tim. 2:15) speaking of the Christian "who is husband of one wife, whether he be presbyter, deacon, or layman, if he conducts his marriage unblameably; for he shall be saved by child-bearing."³⁰ He declares clearly that "marriage is cooperation with the work of God's creation."³¹ Clement goes on to say that the unmarried man is inferior to the married because he has fewer opportunities of self-denial, while the married man "shows himself inseparable from the love of God, and rises superior to every temptation which assails him through children and wife and servants and possessions."³²

Resisting the Gnostic world-denying understanding of some verses of the New Testament, Clement insists that the Apostles were married, and Paul himself was married, and "the only reason why he did not take her about with him was that it would have been an inconvenience for his ministry."³³ Believing that the married and unmarried states are alike gifts of God,³⁴ he puts his concept as such: "Our view is that we welcome as blessed the state of abstinence from marriage in those to whom this has been granted by God; and admire monogamy and the high standing of single marriage."³⁵ There is nothing meritorious about abstinence from marriage unless it arises from love to God and true chastity as a gift of God's grace.³⁶

Although Clement's judgment is quite positive, he recognizes the value of marriage within narrow limits. In fact, he does not completely condemn sex but he restricts it to the purpose of reproduction. However, he echoes Stoic teaching that marriage is to be undertaken for patriotic reasons and for the maintenance of the human race.³⁷ Thus, marriage is holy because "the seed of the sanctified is holy."³⁸ Therefore, all who seek pleasure in marriage are condemned.³⁹ To support his idea, Clement quotes the Stoic Musonius, "The pleasure alone, even if it is enjoyed in a legitimate union, is contrary to the law, to justice, and to reason."⁴⁰ The intention to conceive a child is, for Clement, the rule that divides moderate sexual activity from immoderate.⁴¹ Man must withhold from his wife during the period of her pregnancy and during lactation.⁴² Using the metaphor of the farmer, he advises that sexuality could be only in the moment when the seed can be received with the hope of fruition.⁴³

Clement shared the idea that sexual relations are to be avoided. He held that the Apostles lived with their wives as "sisters," so living with one's wife as with a sister is a realization of the resurrection state on earth.⁴⁴ In Clement's view, the difference between the pagan ideal of self-control and the Christian ideal is that, while the pagan ascetic feels desire and does not give in to it, the Christian does not feel any desire at all.⁴⁵ Clement sees that the uncleanness of marital intercourse needed every time the ceremonial washing such as that prescribed in Leviticus (15:18), but the Christians are cleansed once and for all by their baptism for every such occasion.⁴⁶

Origen

After Clement, Origen reflected the cultural climate of Egypt at his time. His self-castration as a young man in a mistaken idea of celibacy⁴⁷ led him to comment that Christ's saying: "those who are barred from marriage by an act of man" (Matt. 19:12) includes all those who abstain from marriage because of heretical teaching.⁴⁸ In fact, we find Origen several times defending the lawfulness of marriage against the Encratites who are mostly the Marcionites and the Montanists.⁴⁹ He refers to them in the words of St. Paul in I Tim. 4:3 as attaching themselves to demonic doctrines.⁵⁰ Several times allusions were made to the heretics who forbid marriage and preach abstinence⁵¹. We read in his writings against the Marcionites that nothing created by God is impure in itself, and that nothing can be defiled except by the evil thoughts and intentions of humans. He opposed their

distinction of the Creator God of the Old Testament and God the Father of Christ, refuting their allegation that marriage and procreation are cooperation with the former.⁵² Against the Montanists, Origen writes that they found purity in abstinence from marriage and certain foods.⁵³

Alongside that, many passages affirm the essential goodness of the human body. Origen argues, "The body of the rational being that is devoted to the God of the Universe is a temple of the God whom they (Christians) worship."⁵⁴ The human body could be "made holy" for God;⁵⁵ and each Christian man or woman could build their body into a "holy tabernacle of the Lord."⁵⁶ "You have progressed to become a temple of God, and you who were mere flesh and blood have reached so far that you are a limb of Christ's body."⁵⁷

On the other hand, the flesh, for Origen, is impure because it is ambiguous and dangerous. He emphasizes the imperfection of every human act performed by a human being whose concupiscence never entirely leaves. Origen proclaims repeatedly that through time until the end of the world, the trace of past deeds is engraved on human heart, even the traces of thoughts which passed and were rejected by human will.⁵⁸

Origen is one of the Christian authors who developed the idea of an impurity inherent in sexual relationships.⁵⁹ The only difference between the impurity of carnal conditions and that of sexual relations is one of intensity. As an ascetic and mystic, Origen was very sensitive to the danger of enjoyment of sexual relations.⁶⁰ The defilement of

marriage can be overcome to a certain extent if the love of the spouses imitates that of Christ for the Church, and avoids all selfish passion⁶¹. Carnal love is only an abuse of the love which God has put in our hearts in order that we should love him.⁶² Conjugal love, though carnal, must tend more and more toward the spiritual by the harmony between the spouses which would be disturbed by passion, a selfish love seeking the satisfaction of enjoyment, not the good of the partner.⁶³ Origen considers the physical pleasure of sexual bonding in marriage as a bland displacement of true feeling, a deflection of the spirit's capacity for delight into the dulled sensation of the body.⁶⁴ Origen felt that marital intercourse actually coarsens the spirit. It takes place in a "chamber", that is, "in darkness"; and an undisputed suspicion of "wantonness" lingers over it.⁶⁵

Combining marriage with the Fall, he says, "Do not think that just as the belly is made for food and food for the belly, that in the same way the body is made for intercourse. It was made that it should be a temple to the Lord. Adam had a body in Paradise, but in Paradise he did not know Eve."⁶⁶ Origen is the most resolute advocate of the idea that one of the effects of the Fall was that marriage came into existence; a part of his theory of the source of human evil. He thought that human beings come into existence as angelic spirits that fall from beatitude into human bodies. Sexuality, then, is an unfortunate instrument of providing bodies for the fallen spirits.⁶⁷ It is important to mention that St. Peter, Patriarch of Alexandria (c. 300-311 A.D.), protested against Origen's opinion that the union of pre-existent souls with bodies was a consequence of their sin. He adds that the idea was a Greek doctrine, foreign to Christianity.⁶⁸

Several of Origen's writings point to an impurity in sexual relations, even through legitimate marriage. Everything that has any connection with generation stands in need of purification. The child is impure at birth; this original impurity is transmitted by generation as linked to the sexual intercourse of the parents with the passion which accompanies it. For this reason, the Word of God took flesh from a virgin.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, St. Mary had to be subjected to purification forty days after the birth of Jesus.⁷⁰

Origen's idea of the impurity of even lawful sexual relations is derived from his interpretation of I Cor. 7:5; abstention from conjugal relations for the sake of prayer is temporary, to be sure, and agreed between them, but is understood as an obligation.⁷¹ The idea is drawn also from his own understanding of passages of the Old Testament. The woman who has given birth is impure because of the flow of blood, whereas she was not impure during nine months as she was far from the sexual relationships which took place previously.⁷² Elsewhere, Origen directs that the conjugal bedroom is not a convenient place for prayer, because "those who indulge in the pleasures of love are to some extent defiled and impure."⁷³ One cannot think of the Holy Spirit during the conjugal relation. Origen says, "Lawful marriages are not sinful; but at the time when the sex act is performed, the Holy Spirit will not be present, even if it were a prophet doing the act of generation."⁷⁴

Origen, however, endeavors to distinguish the impurity of conjugal relations from sin. It only exists "in some way", and it is only "a certain" impurity. This kind of impurity

does not prevent married people from offering to God their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom. 12:1), outside their marital relations.⁷⁵

Procreation, for Origen, is the essential purpose of marriage. The other purpose is a "remedy against concupiscence," as St. Paul teaches in I Cor. 7:9, but he scarcely thinks that sexual relations can have any effect on conjugal love⁷⁶. Marital chastity and love demand confining intercourse exclusively to the begetting of children. Origen urges that the true Christian has intercourse with his wife only to have offspring, and he cautions married people against having relations once the wife has conceived. Using Seneca's argument from the conduct of animals, he says, "Some women serve lust without any restraint." Indeed I would not compare them to dumb beasts; for beasts, when they conceive, know not to indulge their mates further with their plenty. Intercourse must be suspended until the woman can conceive again.⁷⁷

Origen considers virginity as the most perfect gift after martyrdom. In the sacrifice of virginity, man is at once by his intellect the priest, and in his flesh the victim, like Christ on the Cross. St. Mary among women is the first fruit of virginity as the Lord Jesus is among men.⁷⁸ Virginity was presented as a privileged link between heaven and earth; for God had been able to unite Himself to humanity only through a "holy" body of a virgin woman. The Lord is born and grows all the more in the individual's soul if he or she is a virgin. The celibate is free in complete service to God, unlike the married person who is, in a way, the slave of his

partner, for he surrendered rights over his own body.⁷⁹ Therefore, the body of so great a spirit as John the Baptist must necessarily have remained a virgin.⁸⁰

After Origen

After the time of Origen, the Church of Egypt faced Manichaeism and led a battle against it. One of the earliest examples is the aforementioned anonymous *Epistle against the Manichees*, assigned possibly to Theonas, Patriarch of Alexandria. The surviving portion of this letter warns the faithful against the Manichaean argument that marriage is evil. The author explains on the basis of I Cor. 7:1 that marriage is honored by God, and advises the faithful to be on guard against Manichaean women called the Elect. They were honored by the Manichees because they required their menstrual blood for their abominable rites.⁸¹

At the time of Athanasius, we have two refutations of Manichaeism. Serapion of Thmuis argues in his *Against the Manichees* that the body is not essentially evil; otherwise, it could not be the instrument of virtue. Against Manichaean pessimism about the nature of the body, Serapion declares that man is good by nature, and that evil is dictated by an unhealthy will.⁸² Similar to Serapion, Didymus the Blind, in his *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, found among the Tura Papyri, and in the eighth chapter of his *Contra Manichaeus*, reports in detail about a conversation with a Manichaean on the legitimacy of marriage. He explains that the body is not naturally evil, and that it was not wrong for a Christian to

marry, but it was wrong for an ascetic to do so, as he had submitted himself to a different code.⁸³

According to Socrates, the Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.) wished to enforce that "bishops, presbyters and deacons, should have no conjugal intercourse with wives whom they have married while still laymen." The Egyptian confessor Paphnotius, Bishop of Upper Thebes, warned the assembly against too heavy a burden on the clergy. He asserted that marriage itself is honorable and the bed undefiled (Heb. 13:4), and termed the intercourse of a man with his lawful wife chastity.⁸⁴ Paphnotius' idea seems exceptional to the norm of his age. Authors of the fourth century record attempts to persuade married clergymen to live in perpetual continence. This was already outlined by the council of Elvira.⁸⁵ The collection under the name of *The Teachings of the Apostles*, which was well known in Egypt, condemns intercourse during pregnancy (6:28). It gives as the reason that such intercourse is against nature; that is, it is not used to beget children but in order to have pleasure.⁸⁶

General Remarks

The Church, then, had, to a great extent, accepted the rules of the Roman law of marriage as not contradictory to the Christian belief, and it influenced the legislation of Constantine and his successor Christian Emperors. Believing in God of the Old and New Testament, the Fathers asserted the Jewish view of marriage as established by God

who said, "Increase and multiply." ⁸⁷ (Gen. 1:28) Clement considers the marital lodging as the place where the Lord is in the midst; ⁸⁸ and Origen sees in marriage a mutual giving. ⁸⁹

Adultery was condemned, and divorce was not permitted. ⁹⁰ It is debated whether remarriage after divorce in case of adultery was approved for the innocent spouse. ⁹¹ Even after widowhood, remarriage is hardly tolerated by Clement. "The Apostle allows a man a second marriage because he cannot control himself and burns with passion." ⁹² Although Origen permitted remarriage and even harshly blamed the rigorists who excluded the remarried from the assemblies as if they were open sinners, he held that to take a second wife is not in conformity with Gen. 2:24; one cannot be one flesh with a second woman. "Neither bishop nor presbyter nor deacon nor widow can be twice married." ⁹³

We conclude that Egyptian Fathers, before Athanasius, evaluated marriage as perverted seriously by the sin of the first couple. However urgently they sought to argue against the Encratites that marriage is good, they acknowledged that its goodness carries in it the infection of sin. ⁹⁴ "If nature," says Clement, "led them [Adam and Eve] to procreation, they were impelled to do it more quickly than was proper because they were still young and had been led away by deceit." ⁹⁵ Origen insists that marriage came into existence as a result of the Fall. Marriage, then, before Athanasius, lacks the meaning of sanctification, although it was viewed as established by God for the purpose of procreation. The tendency to look askance at even permissible marital

relations, and to regard virginity and celibacy as more meritorious than the married state, was pervasive. Even Clement, who considered the married as superior to the single, condemned all who seek pleasure in marriage. For him, "To indulge in intercourse without intending children is to outrage nature, whom we should take as our instructor." ⁹⁶ Origen claims that a symbolic meaning of circumcision for Christians is that the true circumcised has intercourse with his wife "only for the sake of posterity." ⁹⁷

Chapter III

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION IN ATHANASIUS

Having outlined pagan and Christian concepts of sanctification in relation to marriage, we will now discuss the Athanasian doctrine of sanctification itself. It is not our concern to discuss all elements of sanctification, but rather those needed to clarify the subject in relation to marriage. It is true that Athanasius did not write a *Summa* of the doctrine of sanctification; however, from his writings we can build up general features of the doctrine. ¹

Sanctification, for Athanasius, means purification from sin by God's grace. God assumed human's flesh and sanctified it, so that "the sanctification coming to the Lord as man may come to all men from Him," and "the salvation of men should be everywhere spread abroad." ² The Lord is "the only Savior and Sanctifier" who carries the weakness of man. All men are sanctified by Him in the Holy Spirit. ³ Eventually, "by perfecting them and making them whole, He might present the Church unto the Father `not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but holy and without blemish' (Eph. 5:27)." ⁴ The call of sanctification is to virgins as well

as to those who are married, "assigning to each its own virtues and an honorable recompense." ⁵

Creation and Fall

Athanasius suggests that to better understand the sanctifying work of the Lord, it is necessary to discuss first the creation and fall of man. ⁶ Proclaiming God as the Creator revealed in the Old Testament, he cites the Biblical statement, "In the beginning God created the heaven and earth." ⁷ (Gen. 1:1) He stresses the world was created *ex nihilo*; ⁸ a theory which was totally unknown to pagan philosophy at his time. ⁹ Athanasius recognizes a clear line of distinction between God the Creator and all creation. None of the things which are brought to be, would be able to create or to be an efficient cause. Any divine hierarchy is rejected. There is nothing between God and creatures which can be called Divine. ¹⁰ The worship of the universe or any part of it is condemned. ¹¹ Creation, however, is beautiful; and it is fitting that one, instead of making a god of it, should admire it and glorify its creator. ¹²

Man, ¹³ the most important part of creation, was made from the earth; ¹⁴ but as God is good and exceedingly noble, He has taken pity upon the race of men, giving them a further gift. He did not merely create them as He made all the irrational creatures on the earth, but made them after His own image. ¹⁵ The image of God in man is his rational soul and understanding, by which he is different from animals. ¹⁶ It is understood as "a portion even of the power of His Logos." ¹⁷

It is wisdom and knowledge impressed in him by the Very Wisdom of God; and if man has it within him, he will acknowledge God. ¹⁸

Man, then, is constituted to be able to know God and conceive even His own eternity, having his mind set towards God in a free contemplation and purity sufficient to reflect God. ¹⁹ Therefore, virtue is not far from man nor external to him, but it is within himself and easy if he only is willing. ²⁰ When man's spiritual faculty is in a natural state, virtue is performed; and it is in a natural state when it remains as it was when it came into existence. ²¹

Creating man in His image, God willed him to abide in incorruption. ²² Knowing how the will of man could sway to either side, He secured grace by a law and by the garden where He placed them. ²³ By violating the commandment of God, man separated himself from God and fell under the law of corruption and of death. Then, "when Adam had transgressed", says Athanasius, "his sin reached unto all men," and with sin all deadly consequences. ²⁴ All men have sinned in Adam; his transgression is theirs. ²⁵ Having rejected the contemplation of God and devised evil for themselves, they no longer remained as they were made but were being corrupted according to their devices. ²⁶ Returning back from apprehending God's providence and other better things, men began to seek the lusts of the body. ²⁷

Incarnation and Salvation

The result of the Fall may be summarized in two main points: firstly, corruption and death; secondly, the obscuring of the image of God through which man can know Him.²⁸ These two results constituted two reasons for the Incarnation. The first one is the need of sanctification and liberation from sin, and the second is restoration of the knowledge of God and recreation of His image in man.²⁹ Athanasius sums up the two purposes as follows: "There were two things which the Savior did for us by becoming man. He banished death from us and made us anew; and, invisible and imperceptible as in Himself He is, He became visible through His works."³⁰

If one asks why God the Word did not appear by means of other nobler parts of creation, Athanasius answers that man alone had fallen into sin and needed sanctification.³¹ Therefore, the Lord assumed a body, "sharing the same nature with all, for it was a human body, though by an unparalleled miracle it was formed of a virgin only; yet being mortal, it was to die, conformably to its peers."³² The affections of the flesh are ascribed to Him; "such namely as to be condemned, to be scourged, to thirst, and the cross, and the death, and the other infirmities of the body." "For this cause," adds Athanasius, "such affections are ascribed not to another but to the Lord; that the grace (of sanctification) also may be from Him."³³

Incarnation is shown by Athanasius to be redemptive act to sanctify fallen mankind. He asserts that neither men

nor angels could sanctify and recreate God's image, for men are merely made after this image, whereas angels are not even the images of God. "Whence the Word of God came in His own person, that, as He is the Image of the Father, He might be able to create man after the image." ³⁴ He came to His creation to become for them "the Door, the Shepherd, the Way, the King, and the Governor of all." ³⁵ He is "our sanctification and redemption (I Cor. 1:30);" for "in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28)." ³⁶ The Word of God became flesh, so that the flesh might be sanctified by Him. ³⁷ The idea of the efficacy of Christ for sanctification is always present in Athanasius' mind. Sanctification is the victory of the Savior's work, "Who condemns sin in the flesh, that the ordinance of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:3,4) ³⁸

The goal, then, of the Incarnation is to save man from corruption and death, and grant him a holy and immortal life; thus, sin must necessarily be removed. ³⁹ To destroy death which "could not, from its very nature, appear save in the body," ⁴⁰ the Word assumed our flesh, a true flesh, ⁴¹ "for we should have had nothing common with what was foreign" to us. ⁴² "Thus, taking from our bodies one of like nature, because all were under penalty of the corruption of death, He gave it over to death instead of all, and offered it to the Father." ⁴³

Athanasius states that the need of man for salvation and sanctification "preceded His being made man," apart from which the Lord had not put on flesh. ⁴⁴ "His becoming

man would not have taken place, had not the need of man become a cause." ⁴⁵ He explains by a parable that the Lord's assuming a human body was His plan before He created man or the world; "as a wise architect, proposing to build a house, consults also about repairing it, should it at any time become dilapidated after building." ⁴⁶ God is the wise Architect, who foreseeing that man might collapse, willed his restoration. "The will and the purpose were made ready before the world, but have taken effect when the need required." ⁴⁷ The Bishop of Alexandria clarifies the relation of the incarnation to salvation saying, "Since it was not possible for Him to die, as He was immortal, He took to Himself a body such as could die ... on behalf of all." ⁴⁸

For Athanasius, it is not only Incarnation and Crucifixion that were needed to sanctify man's life, but the whole life of the Lord who assumed the properties and infirmities of man and all that pertains to the flesh. ⁴⁹ Quoting John 17:18-9, he teaches that the Lord "sanctifies Himself, that we may be sanctified in the truth." ⁵⁰ The descent of the Holy Spirit on Him in the Jordan after Baptism "was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body." This took place "for our sanctification, that we might share His anointing," so that "sanctification coming to the Lord as man, may come to all men from Him." ⁵¹ Then through His resurrection, He "delivered our race from the bondage of corruption," ⁵² and by His ascension as man, He carried to heaven all mankind in the flesh which He bore, consecrating for them the way of glory. ⁵³ At the second coming of the Lord, the same body will rise to join the soul. ⁵⁴ The body of the faithful will be similar to that of the glorious Lord, for "instead of mortal it becomes immortal;

and, though an animal body, it becomes spiritual, and though made from earth it enters the heavenly gates." ⁵⁵

Deification and Adoption

Sanctification is achieved by receiving the divine nature, so that man "might partake ... the life and grace which is from Him." ⁵⁶ To sanctify and to deify is one process. "The Word became flesh that He might hallow and deify men." ⁵⁷ He assumed a created and human body, "that having renewed it as its Framer, He might deify it in Himself, and thus might introduce us all into the kingdom of heaven after His likeness." ⁵⁸ Athanasius emphasizes that deification of man is the very purpose of the Incarnation of the Lord. "He has become man that He might deify us in Himself." ⁵⁹ Then he adds, "He has been born of a woman, and begotten of a Virgin, in order to transfer to Himself our erring generation, and that we may become henceforth a holy race, and 'partakers of the Divine nature', as blessed Peter wrote (II Peter 1:4)." ⁶⁰

To secure the doctrine of deification as the important way for his people to live a sanctified life, the Alexandrian Pastor resisted Arianism vigorously, and insisted that the Lord could not grant man deification and incorruptibility unless He Himself is divine and incorruptible. ⁶¹ He defended all his life the absolute divinity of the Savior as the base of man's deification. He writes, "If the Son were a creature, man had remained mortal as before, not being joined to God; for a creature had not joined creatures to God,

as seeking itself one to join it." ⁶² For the same reason, Athanasius defended the divinity of the Holy Spirit in whom all creatures are sanctified and deified. ⁶³

In addition, deification is identified with adoption. When the Christians are deified by the Lord, the natural Son of God, they become adopted sons. ⁶⁴ "Because of our relationship to His body, we too have become God's temple, and in consequence are made God's sons." ⁶⁵ Alongside that, adopted sonship is understood in terms of recapitulation; the Lord became "beginning and foundation of our new creation and renewal." ⁶⁶ "As He is a foundation," says Athanasius, "and we stones built upon Him, so He is a Vine and we knit to Him as branches." Therefore, "taking on Him what is ours (our body), we, as incorporated and compacted and bound together in Him through the likeness of the flesh, may attain unto a perfect man, and abide immortal and incorruptible." ⁶⁷

Nevertheless, deification and sonship are "not according to the Essence of Godhead; for this surely is impossible; but according to His manhood." ⁶⁸ The believers become sons of God, not as the One Son in nature and truth but according to His grace. By receiving the Spirit, they do not lose their own proper substance, as the Lord when made man was no less God. ⁶⁹ Therefore, if they have been called gods, they are not so by nature but by participation in the Son. ⁷⁰ Athanasius' teaching of man's share in the divine nature did not signify a strict parallel with God's share in human nature, but rather the change in man achieved through his relationship with the divine humanity of the Lord. ⁷¹ However, it is not fictitious, nor by mere knowledge, but

based upon the physical unity of the divine with the human in the Lord, and the participation of the believer in the Lord's body.⁷²

The Part of Man

Sanctification of man could not be automatic or magical; it required free human response to God's grace. Athanasius unswervingly emphasizes the presence and importance of free will in man who is "able, as on the one hand to incline to what is good, so on the other to reject it."⁷³ Man has the choice between faith and corporeal pleasures.⁷⁴ He is called by God to receive the gift of sanctification, but God's grace should not be ignored. God expects the believers to obey Him fervently, running in order to reach Him.⁷⁵ Although holiness is the gift of God, all people are exhorted to "cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (II Cor. 7:1)."⁷⁶ Man is required to offer to the Lord "every virtue, and that holiness which is in Him;"⁷⁷ for "not in vain should we receive the grace"⁷⁸. Athanasius advises, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee? (I Tim. 4:14)."⁷⁹ At the same time, he recognizes that man's will is weak and his strength is poor, but the Christian must put the things of the Savior above the desires of his body.⁸⁰

In fact, according to Athanasius, only Christians may be deified and sanctified, therefore pure faith and knowledge are needed in the process of sanctification; and the righteous person, fed by them, always has a holy life⁸¹. Receiving

baptism, and the unction of the Holy Spirit are essential for the Christian. The baptism of the Lord took place for man's sanctification "because of His bearing our body." ⁸² Baptismal holiness, however, can be lost. In order to preserve it, the believer must achieve a strong relation with Christ and imitate the virtue and perfection of His life and pattern. ⁸³

The personal work of man, who has to keep the faith and stretch towards God by thoughts and acts, occupies an important place in Athanasius' conception of sanctification. The state of the Christian is a continuous fight against sin, fortified by God's grace. Man cannot get rid of sin unless he is exercising piety and following the Lord faithfully; for through His grace, sin and corruption will run away from his life, and he shall be found sanctified in spirit, soul and body. ⁸⁴ The Christian should be diligent and "burning like a flame," so that, by an ardent spirit, "he destroys carnal sin." ⁸⁵ His part is that he must be constantly thirsty for Christ's grace and ardently desiring Him. ⁸⁶ The Alexandrian Saint stresses some activities as elements of spiritual struggle. He advises his people to be fervent in the Spirit in fasting and prayer. ⁸⁷ Watching and vigil were usual in the Church of Athanasius as preparatory to the Communion on the morrow. ⁸⁸ Repentance is the duty of the believer ⁸⁹; and Communion is the climax of worship. ⁹⁰

The Holy Scripture is also an important element in sanctification; it is sufficient to instruct man perfectly. ⁹¹ Athanasius recognizes the Old Testament as well as the New. The Lord came to fulfill, not to abolish, the law and

commandments; and sacrifices are to be carried on in a pure and spiritual manner. ⁹² The Psalms have a particular importance. ⁹³ In his 39th *Paschal Letter* of 367 A.D., Athanasius enumerates all the books of the Old and New Testament and declares them to be the only canonical ones accepted by the Church. ⁹⁴ The Letter meant to condemn the attempt of the heretics, most probably Gnostics and Manichees, to introduce apocryphal works as inspired scriptures. ⁹⁵ The Holy Scripture is for Christian guidance, nourishment and sanctification. ⁹⁶

The Bible, for Athanasius, must be understood and interpreted according to the tradition of the Church; "for as each of the saints has received, that they impart without alteration for the confirmation of the doctrine." ⁹⁷ His main purpose is to substantiate "the very tradition, teaching and faith of the Catholic Church from the beginning, which the Lord gave, the Apostle's preached, and the Fathers kept." ⁹⁸ He writes that he himself imparts of what he has learned from "inspired teachers" who have also become martyrs for the faith. ⁹⁹ The Ecumenical Council of Nicaea is authoritative and its Creed is final, although its authority is secondary to that of Scripture and its scriptural character is its justification. ¹⁰⁰

Athanasius' approach to sanctification has been developed according to different events and changing circumstances. In his first Pastoral Letter for the year 329 A.D., he blows "the priestly trumpets" of sanctification which call to virginity as well as to "conjugal harmony," ¹⁰¹ and exhorts his people to "sanctify a fast" and separate

themselves from evil.¹⁰² He adds, "Let us remember the poor, and not forget kindness to strangers; above all let us love God with all our soul."¹⁰³ In his following Letters, he advises that the Christian must thirst for God's grace and keep the commandments of the Gospel according to the traditions of the Church.¹⁰⁴ The Arian controversy, though in existence, has not raged yet, therefore Arianism is expressed in cryptic terms when he exclaims, "What communion has righteousness with iniquity and the heretics with the saints?"¹⁰⁵ After the Council of Tyre in 335 A.D., he speaks openly about Arius' failure to recognize the divine saving work of Christ. The Letter for the year 338 A.D. confirms the "chastity of everyone," and asserts that unless Christ is Divine, he cannot sanctify man's life.¹⁰⁶ The following Letter proclaims that pure faith and godliness are allied to each other.¹⁰⁷ The Letters written during Athanasius' exiles and tribulations with the Arians show the importance of pain for sanctification;¹⁰⁸ while those written during the period called the golden decade of his life (346-356 A.D.), reflect public rejoicing. A wave of spiritual enthusiasm passed over the whole community.¹⁰⁹ Finally, the Letters for the last period of his life, which was almost quiet, represent the quiescence and dying out of Arianism. So, they reflect the feelings of the old Bishop who spent his life struggling for faith. He advises his faithful people to cling to the true faith and tradition of the Church, to persevere in prayer and spiritual activities, and to remember the poor, so that they may hear, "Enter into the joy of thy Lord (Matt. 25:21)."¹¹⁰

Summary and Remarks

Athanasius teaches that all things are made out of nothing by God's grace and will, and thus admit of ceasing to be, if it so pleases Him who made them. Although man also shared in this natural instability of the world, he had the privilege of being created in the image of God. Consequently virtue is within man; and easy if he only is willing to keep his spiritual faculty as it came into existence. Yet, by his fall, man separated himself from God; and fell into lusts for himself and his senses. However, for man's salvation, Christ is presented as the main source of sanctification; His Incarnation is the redemptive act to sanctify humanity, so that as corruption was ingrained in man's nature, life should cleave to it. ¹¹¹ In fact, the whole life of the Lord is important for man's sanctification: His baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and His ascension. On His second-coming, man's body will rise and be glorified with Him in heaven forever. Although offered freely to all, the grace of sanctification must be appropriated through ascetic effort. Man should be diligent in prayer, fasting, repentance and communion. Finally sanctification is not merely of the soul but of the whole man, of the body and soul alike; and its call is for all people, both married and unmarried. ¹¹²

Chapter IV

SANCTIFICATION IN RELATION TO MARRIAGE IN ATHANASIUS:

A SURVEY

Having outlined some elements of the doctrine of sanctification in Athanasius, we will now survey the same doctrine in relation to marriage. An emphasis on his attitude to matter and the human body will throw some light on the subject. His viewpoint on marriage, sexuality and procreation will be discussed, in order to show to what extent marriage is honored and sanctified. Then marriage in relation to virginity, and, lastly, the eschatological aspect of marriage will be examined.

IV.1 Matter and the Human Body

Evidently, the view of marriage depends upon the view of matter and the human body. The ascetic tendencies which prevailed in Athanasius' time and carried different attitudes of the body influenced the view of marriage. Now, what is Athanasius' outlook on matter and the material body; and how does he consider the body of Christ and its relation to the body of the human race?

Matter

Athanasius, as mentioned before, asserts that God, as the Source of goodness, made all things good and pure. He proclaims that it is irreligious to suppose that he disdained, as if it was a humble task, to form the creation Himself. It is He who made all things small and great.¹ Creation was wrought by the absolute hand of God² without any need of a mediator, as the Arians argue.³ It was a kind of condescension. He condescended to created things originate, that it might be possible for them to come to be. For they could not have endured His nature which was untempered splendor nature ... unless condescending by the Father's love for man.⁴

All existing matter, then, is the direct result of the fashioning hand of God who cannot create anything that is evil. The dualistic theory of creation claimed by Gnostics and Manichees is rejected. They "imagine another god

besides the true One, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and that he is the unmade producer of evil and the head of wickedness, who is also artificer of creation." This must appear paradoxical and impossible, for "evil does not come from good, nor is it in, or the result of, good, since in that case it would not be good, being mixed in its nature or a cause of evil." ⁵ Evil, for Athanasius, has no independent and substantive existence, for good is, while evil is not. ⁶ Probably, Athanasius' idea of evil is similar to that of Plotinus, but not the same. The Plotinian evil is not the simple privation of Athanasius' teaching. Evil, for Plotinus, but not for Athanasius, is necessary and inevitable. ⁷

Believing in *creatio ex nihilo*, Athanasius emphasizes that the presence of God in nature is necessary, not only for coming into being but also for the future maintaining in being. Creation could again cease to exist if it pleased its creator. ⁸ Then, seeing all created nature to be subject to dissolution, God did not leave it to run the risk of once more dropping out of existence. He guided and settled the whole creation by His own Word, "for through Him and in Him all things consist, things visible and things invisible. (Col. 1:17)" ⁹ God quickens and sustains all things everywhere, to make up one concordant harmony. ¹⁰ Even though creation be a thing made, it is not absurd that God should be in it; for He is in the whole universe, and the whole is illuminated and moved by Him. By His own power He is united with each and all, and orders all things without limit. ¹¹ It is not unworthy of God to exercise His providence, even down to things so small as a hair of the head, a sparrow, or the grass of the field, as it was not unworthy for Him to make them. ¹² Because of His providence for man, "He, always as now,

speaks to the sun and it rises, and commands the clouds and it rains upon one place; and where it does not rain it is dried up, and He bids the earth yield her fruit."¹³

Accordingly, God, the Maker of matter, deals with it directly. "He speaks face to face with Moses, himself a man, and descends upon Mount Sinai."¹⁴ The Lord Jesus Christ went upon the sea and walked as on dry land; and at the wedding of Cana, He transformed the substance of water into wine (John 2:1-11).¹⁵ Above all, bread and wine, although material, are considered worthy to be introduced as the Lord's body and blood. The Savior says, 'Take, eat and drink; this is My body and My blood.'" (Matt. 26:26)¹⁶ The bread and wine are shown as a spiritual food; and whoever partakes of them may have the life of sanctification.¹⁷ It is remarkable that the "six holy and great days" of the Holy Week are interpreted by Athanasius as the symbol of the creation of the world¹⁸. Matter, then, is not only sanctified but it is possible for it to be used by God as means of granting the grace of sanctification.

The Human Body

The human body, consequently, is sanctified as created by the good God¹⁹. It is blessed by His hand when He from the beginning made humans "male and female." (Matt. 19:4)²⁰ Athanasius believes that not only Adam and Eve but also all generations are created directly by God through procreation.²¹ The body is divinely founded as united with

the soul in a unity called man, created in the image of God, in order to be able to abide for ever in holiness. ²²

Thus, man's body is open to being introduced into the full presence of God. ²³ By communion with God, the rational element, which is His image, ought to catch the ideal harmony and impose it upon the bodily members; and when it gets rid of sin, it "retains only the likeness of the Image in its purity." ²⁴ Man has inside him an ever abiding nexus between him and God, for his body is called to be a temple of God, indwelled and sanctified by Him. (I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16) ²⁵ This is the "very thing the Savior declared and confirmed when He said, 'The kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke 17:12) ²⁶

Although the human body is mortal, its actions will be examined in the last day; "For ... we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may receive according as he hath done in the body, whether it be good or bad (II Cor. 5:10)." ²⁷ The body will die indeed, but it will rise again. The resurrection of the dead is in reality a resurrection of the flesh. "Like the seeds which are cast into the earth, we do not perish by dissolution, but sown in the earth, shall rise again." ²⁸ The saints will have their bodies honored and glorified in heaven; having put off the body which is corrupt, they shall receive it incorrupt. ²⁹ It is important to mention that Enoch did not die but was taken by God in body (Gen. 5:24); and Paul was caught up "whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know; God knoweth (II Cor. 12:2)." ³⁰

Athanasius believes that the life and death of the body depend upon the divine sentence; and that without God's permitting, neither a hair of man's head can become white or black, nor a sparrow ever fall into the snare (Matt. 5:36; 10:29).³¹ As the Creator of times, God allotted a time to every man; a time to die and a time to live; as there is a time for spring and for summer, for autumn and for winter.³² It is not by chance, "as some of the Gentiles imagine in their fables."³³ Defending his flight of 357 A.D., the Bishop of Alexandria mentions that to give oneself to one's enemies to be murdered is the same thing as to murder oneself, and to become guilty of death. As God himself gives life to man's body joining the soul to it, one must not transgress the Lord's saying, "What God hast joined, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:6)."³⁴ According to Athanasius, the extremely aggressive action of the Arians was that the bodies of those who were killed by them were not immediately given up for burial but were cast out to the dogs, until their relatives came secretly and stole them with great risk to themselves.³⁵

Now, if the body is so sanctified and honored, what is its relation to evil and sin? The body, as created by God, is necessarily good; and even when it becomes the place where sin is actually manifested, it does not become evil in itself. The original constitution of man is in grace and in the knowledge of God, but man "abused the name of good" when he departed from the contemplation of the things of thought. He used "to the full the several activities of the body," thinking that "pleasure was the very essence of good."³⁶ He regarded himself, holding to things nearer to him which were the body and its senses.³⁷

Evil, then, does not pertain to the members of the body, but "consists in a false imagination in the thoughts of men." ³⁸ The part of free will is acknowledged by Athanasius. The will of man can sway to either side; good or evil. ³⁹ Thus, evil consists essentially in the choice of moving "the members of the body ... in an opposite way," ⁴⁰ The attention, instead of fixing on the good within, allows itself to be attracted by the outer world. The corrupted will of men, "moving their hands to the contrary, it made them commit murder, and led away their hearing to disobedience, and their other members to adultery instead of lawful procreation." ⁴¹ Commenting on this subject, Athanasius recalls the principle proclaimed by St. Paul, "All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient (I Cor. 10:23)." ⁴² The members of the body, as well as the whole creation, are good, but they all must move into the appropriate direction.

The faculty of free will is attributed to the soul as mobile by nature. ⁴³ Athanasius writes, "As the strings of the lyre have each its proper note, ..., in like manner, the senses being disposed in the body like a lyre, ..., the soul distinguishes and knows what it is doing and what it is acting." ⁴⁴ The human soul may rightly use this faculty in good, or misuse it in sinking to selfish desires. ⁴⁵ So the soul is blamed for moving the body as a charioteer moves his chariot. ⁴⁶ According to Athanasius, sin is possible on the part of the soul as well as of the body. Although defilement could not be committed except by the body and its senses, it is considered "a vice and sin of the soul." Accordingly, when the soul is sincere, it follows that the body will be pure. ⁴⁷ Hence, the people are called to keep the feasts "with sincerity of soul and purity of body." ⁴⁸

The Alexandrian Pastor sums up his view of sanctification in relation to the body in a passage of singular beauty:

Let us cleanse our hands. Let us purify the body. Let us keep our mind from guile; not giving up ourselves to excess and to lusts, but occupying ourselves entirely with our Lord and with divine doctrines; so that, being all together pure, we may be able to partake of the Word.⁴⁹

The call here is to keep the whole mind from guile. It is the mind, not the body, which is apt to be deceived; and if so, the body is attracted to lusts. The natural use of the body is acknowledged, but excess is forbidden. Then, there is no contradiction between the natural life and the commandments of God, for evil consists in excess which means here to abuse the body against its good nature. The body in its nature is good, and it will be sanctified if one occupies oneself "entirely with the Lord and with divine doctrine." Consequently the body is called upon, as well as the soul, to be "partaker of the divine nature." (2 Peter 1:4)

However, if the body is under the direction of its soul, it is not because the soul is immaterial and thus more divine, but because the soul is created to be the directive force to its body. The body is that part of the human being's constitution which forms his substantial instrument of actions.⁵⁰ It is distinct from the soul but it is not denigrated as naturally evil. The idea is that of instrumentality; the body is the material organ through which the soul performs its actions.

It is through the body that every person can bear witness to God in the society around him. Therefore, God did not disdain to go down with Jacob into Egypt, and for Abraham's sake corrected Abimelek because of Sarah⁵¹. Athanasius did not rely upon a Platonic conception of the human soul as preexistent and belonged to the divine and spiritual world and was trapped in the material world by its unity with the body.⁵² In opposition to Hellenistic dualism in which the soul and body oppose each other, Athanasius believes that humanity is composed of an immaterial soul and material body, and the former acts through the latter. There is no ethical dualism in which the body is evil. For him, such idea contradicts the doctrine of God as the good Creator.⁵³

The Lord's Body

The sanctification of the human body and the physical senses have been looked upon in the light of the Incarnation. The relation of the human body to Christ' body is the cornerstone of Athanasius' sanctified view of the former. The belief announced by the Council of Nicaea and defended strongly by him which confirms that the "true God from the true God ... became incarnate," implies that the human body is good; for only such a body could the good and true God assume.

The material body of the Lord is the foundation of man's sanctification. "His flesh before all others was saved and liberated, as being the Word's body; and henceforth we, becoming incorporate with It, are saved after Its pattern."⁵⁴

The human element incorporated in the Lord became not only sanctified but a means of sanctification. Upon the Lord's proceeding from Mary, He straightway is called "Emmanuel, which is being interpreted God with us (Matt. 1:23)." ⁵⁵ From thence, man could have God's grace "united to his body." ⁵⁶ The Lord has adapted the body as an instrument to manifest Himself as the Savior and Sanctifier. ⁵⁷ "It was a bodily hand that He stretched out to raise her that was sick of a fever (Mark 1:31); a human voice that He uttered to raise Lazarus from the dead (John 11:43); and, stretching out His hands upon the Cross, He overthrew the prince of the power of the air. (Eph. 2:2)" ⁵⁸ Athanasius confirms that it was the Lord's own human body which was raised from the dead and taken up into heaven. ⁵⁹ By His bodily ascension, ⁶⁰ He opened the way for everybody up to the heavens, "whither the humanity of the Lord, in which He will judge the quick and the dead, entered as a precursor for us." ⁶¹ In that body, the Lord became "our guide to the Kingdom of Heaven and to His Father, saying, "I am the way, and the door, and through Me all must enter." ⁶²

The human body of the Lord is likened to the temple; and the believers are advised to honor "the Lord Who is in the flesh as in the temple," being a source of sanctification. ⁶³ It is likened also to the sacrificial robes of Aaron which were the symbol of mediation between God and man. The mediation of Christ's bodily sacrifice is described as eternal and universal for the sanctification of the whole world. ⁶⁴ Accordingly, the Lord instituted the holy Eucharist to sanctify man. The Lord took our human body, and, consecrating it, He gives this consecrated humanity to those

from whom He received it, saying, "Take, eat and drink; this is My Body, and My Blood. (Matt. 26:26-28) ⁶⁵

Athanasius defends that "the flesh did not diminish the glory of the Lord; far be the thought: on the contrary, it was glorified by Him." ⁶⁶ It is not unsuitable for the Lord to be present in creation, for if we admit the presence of the Lord in the universe as a whole, there can be nothing absurd or incredible in His manifesting Himself through a human body. ⁶⁷ The Lord "was not impaired in receiving a body," but both angels and archangels are now worshipping Him, though He became man and was called Jesus. ⁶⁸ Just as the sun is not defiled by the contact of its rays with earthly objects, but rather enlightens and purifies them, so He Who made the sun is not defiled by being made known in a body, but rather the body is cleansed and quickened by His dwelling. ⁶⁹ It is by reason of the bodily conditions that the Lord showed the works of Godhead. Athanasius states as a rule: "What He endured by means of the body, He magnified as God; and while he hungered in the flesh, as God He fed the hungry." ⁷⁰

A great addition has occurred to the human body itself from the fellowship and union of the Lord with it; for "instead of mortal it became immortal, ... and though made of earth, it entered the heavenly gates." ⁷¹ He shared nothing in the defects of the body, but rather sanctified it by His dwelling. ⁷² Man had not been delivered from sin unless it had been by nature a human flesh which the Lord put on. He united what is human by nature to Him who is in the nature of the Godhead. ⁷³ Before Bethlehem, the Lord worked from

above upon man's conscience; but after Bethlehem, He brought Himself into contact with man's senses through His body. ⁷⁴ The Lord's sojourn in the flesh deified it; for in receiving a body, He deified that which He put on and gave it graciously to the race of man. ⁷⁵ He sanctified His own body that He may sanctify all of us in Himself. ⁷⁶ It was fitting that while "through Him" all things came into being at the beginning, "in Him" all things should be set right. (cf. John 1:3; Eph. 1:10) ⁷⁷ "Because of our relationship to His body, we too have become God's temple." ⁷⁸

Therefore, the Bishop of Alexandria endeavored to prove that the human nature of the Lord is akin to our nature. "The Word of God, Who is incorporeal by nature, appeared for our sakes in the body and suffered for all." ⁷⁹ Athanasius quotes repeatedly John 1:14, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." ⁸⁰ "He took unto Himself a body of no different sort from ours", "a body of our kind;" "one of like nature." "He has come to our realm and taken up His abode in one body among His peers. ⁸¹ For Athanasius, the body of the Lord is created and human; yet, He Himself is "its framer." ⁸² "He fashioned His body for Himself from a virgin," and enveloped Himself "in a body of earth." ⁸³

Athanasius emphasizes also the concreteness of the Lord's body, as opposed to Gnostic docetism. He writes, "Surely He took true flesh, though Valentinus rave." ⁸⁴

(Gnostics and Manichees) lie against the truth, erring concerning the Lord's body, as if He did not take flesh of Mary, or as if He

has not died at all, nor become man, but only appeared, and was not truly, and seemed to have a body when He had not, and seemed to have the shape of man as visions in a dream. ⁸⁵

It is true that, before Athanasius, Clement and Origen maintained the reality of Christ's body against Gnosticism. ⁸⁶ Clement, in particular, explains "the ground upon which docetism is held by Cassianus, Marcion, and even Valentinus who teaches that Christ's body was psychic," saying that "they blaspheme against the will of God and the mystery of creation in speaking evil of birth." ⁸⁷ Nevertheless, both Clement and Origen are suspected of docetism. Their tendency to spiritualize the human nature of Christ seems to make its reality merely relative. Clement quotes with approval Valentinus' idea that Jesus "ate and drank in a manner peculiar to Himself, and the food did not pass out of his body;" ⁸⁸ and Origen believes that the Logos gradually absorbed Jesus' body, and finally transformed it into spirit. ⁸⁹

Contrarily, Athanasius defends strongly the reality of Christ's body. He cites that the Lord "by hunger, thirst and suffering, ... showed that he had taken our flesh, and was made man." ⁹⁰ His body suffered, "being pierced on the tree, and water and blood flowed from its side." ⁹¹ "Having become man, it was proper for these things to be predicated of Him as man, to show Him to have a body in truth, and not in seeming *alhqeia kai mh fantasia swma*." ⁹² Athanasius goes to say that the Lord "when He had taken a body, He should exhibit what was proper to it, lest the imaginary theory of Manichaeus should prevail." ⁹³

Docetism, for Athanasius, is against the doctrine of both salvation from sin and the resurrection of man's body. "If the Logos were in the body putatively, and by putative is meant imaginary, it follows that both the salvation and the resurrection of man is apparent only, as the most impious Manichaeus held." ⁹⁴ Docetism is not simply a denial of Christ's body, but a denigration of the flesh which is seen as the instrument of sanctification. The Manichaean hatred of the human body, which is the foundation of their docetism, led them to be "in doubt about meats," and to "scatter thoughts of uncleanness and defilement" concerning the body and, accordingly, marriage and sexuality. ⁹⁵

It is interesting to know that Athanasius proclaims that Arianism has the same docetic attitude of Gnosticism and Manichaeism. When the Arians "deny the Godhead of the Son of God," they actually "do not acknowledge His coming in the flesh." ⁹⁶ "Their error," for him, "belongs to Valentinus, Marcion and Manichaeus, of whom some substituted the idea of appearance for reality, while the others ... denied the truth that 'the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us' (John. 1:14)." ⁹⁷ He concludes that the Arians, like the Gnostics and Manichees, "make light of the flesh." ⁹⁸

Finally, Athanasius understands John 1:14, "The Word was made flesh," that the Lord became a living person of body and soul. The Lord "assumed on our behalf living flesh, and has become man." ⁹⁹ The flesh here stands for the whole person: "For to say 'The Word became flesh' is equivalent to saying 'The Word has become man;' according

to what is said in Joel (2:28), 'I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all flesh;' for the promise did not extend to the irrational animals, but is for men, on whose account the Lord is become Man ¹⁰⁰. (swma) and (anqrwpoç) for Athanasius, may qualify one another; yet, they do not signify each other. ¹⁰¹ He asserts the existence of Christ's human soul as well as body, to guarantee salvation and sanctification for the whole man. "The first cause of the Savior's being made man enanqrwphsewç" is to renew man who was created in His image. ¹⁰² The Lord assumed a full humanity of a real body and soul; thus, "the whole man, body and soul alike, has truly obtained salvation in the Word Himself." ¹⁰³

However, the question of the integrity of Christ's human nature came into prominent discussion in several parts of the Christian world, and it was soon to give rise to the system of Apollinarius. ¹⁰⁴ In 362 A.D., the idea of denying Christ's soul was discussed at the Council of Alexandria as a part of the Arian Christology, and it was condemned. ¹⁰⁵ The Council states in its *Synodal Letter to the People of Antioch*, "It was not possible, when the Lord had become man for us, that His body should be without intelligence, nor was the salvation effected in the Word Himself a salvation of body only, but of soul also." ¹⁰⁶ The Lord assumed what He intended to save. ¹⁰⁷

We conclude that matter in general, and the human body in particular, are sanctified as created by the one good God. The original constitution of the body is in purity and holiness. It is neither evil nor a source of evil; for evil comes from outside, when man directs his free will towards a false idea that the lusts of the body are the very essence of good.

The human body is honored by God who assumed it and ascribed it to himself as "God's body." ¹⁰⁸ Thus, human body became a source of sanctification, for through Christ's body, man could have God's grace "united to his body." ¹⁰⁹ The Lord assumed a real and integral humanity of both soul and body to achieve salvation for the whole man.

Now, the body is so honored and sanctified; what of the state of marriage?

IV.2 The Honorable Marriage

As mentioned before, Athanasius asserts the Bible's statement that all creation is made good; (Gen.1:31) ¹¹⁰ and "every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving." (I Tim.4:4) ¹¹¹ Against varieties of abstainers, "whose only pleasure is to gainsay what is said aright", he writes, "All things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the Word of God has made nothing useless or impure." ¹¹²

Male and Female

At the peak of God's creation was man himself, made in God's image and likeness, as a result of His goodness and love. ¹¹³ Mankind, from the beginning, had not only the ability "to see and know realities," ¹¹⁴ but also to live with each other as male and female. This is Athanasius' concept of the story of man's creation. "The divine Scripture says in the person of God, 'Let us make man after our image and likeness'." (Gen. 1:26) ¹¹⁵ Man is made of two sexes, for "He who created them, made them male and female." (Matt. 19:4) ¹¹⁶ These two aspects of human being are inseparable in God's dealing with man. He brought them together "into His own garden and gave them a law; so that if they kept the grace and remained good, they might still keep the life in paradise without sorrow or pain or care." ¹¹⁷ They were intended to enjoy, in freedom and purity of soul, the contemplation of God and divine things. ¹¹⁸

Marriage, then, is God's design "from the beginning,"¹¹⁹ when He formed man as two different beings; and the difference is sexual. Marriage is also blessed and sanctified by God. The significance of this blessing becomes more obvious in the saying of the Lord based on the second story of creation (Gen. 2):

Whereas the Lord says to the Jews, "Have ye not read that from the beginning He who created them made them male and female, and said, "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and the twain shall become one flesh?" and then, referring to the Creator, says, "What therefore God hath joined together let not man put asunder"; how come these men to assert that the creation is independent of the Father?¹²⁰

Athanasius affirms that there is no demiurge or creator "distinct from the Father of Christ". "Making no exception," St. John says, "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made." (1:3)¹²¹ While "the sectaries¹²² imagine for themselves a different artificer of all things, other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," Athanasius believes that the only good God who created the whole world, created man, male and female, and established marriage. The institution of marriage, then, is a direct creation of God, and "not independent of the Father."¹²³ In his *Epistle to the Virgins*, he writes, "The Holy Scriptures tell

us that God framed woman from Adam, and that He created marriage." ¹²⁴

One Flesh

The aforementioned saying of the Lord outlines the concept of the sanctity of marriage, considering that the couple is no longer two but one flesh. They now form a single creature in the eyes of God. It is the Lord himself who achieved that union of husband and wife, and "joined them together." (Matt. 19:6) ¹²⁵ Athanasius likens the unity of marriage to the unity of the human body and soul. In his *Apologia De Fuga*, he writes that the wise men of God might not deliver themselves up to their persecutors, "for this would have been to kill themselves, and to become guilty of death, and to transgress the saying of the Lord: What God hath joined let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:6) ¹²⁶ God the Creator who joined the soul and body into one human being, He Himself joined the twain to become one flesh.

The fact that husband and wife are one flesh is present in Athanasius' writings. In his *Epistola Encyclic,a* ¹²⁷ he quotes the story of a certain Levite, writing that when he considered "the pollution" which happened to his wife, ¹²⁸ he divided her body and sent a part of it to every tribe in Israel (cf. Judges 19). The Bishop comments, "The Levite was injured" in the person of his wife, and he was "astounded at the outrage which had been committed against him." ¹²⁹ Thus, as one body with his wife, he himself was injured in

her person, and the sexual pollution and calamity had afflicted him personally.

Let not man put asunder

Since "the twain shall become one flesh," (Matt. 19:5)¹³⁰ husband and wife cannot break their union without contradicting in practice God's work and commandment: "What, therefore, God hath joined together let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:6)¹³¹ Divorce is in itself inconsistent with the original divine institution of marriage. The Lord reflects the positive nature of marriage as a divine bond and permanent unity, and asserts intensively the fact that marriage is indissoluble, and the union between husband and wife is an end in itself as forming one flesh. The practice of divorce is sinful, for "it breaks the law that marriage was not to be put asunder."¹³² It is a consequence of hardness of heart. When the Jews asked the Lord about divorce, He said that it had been permitted them because of the hardness of their hearts, "but from the beginning, it was not so." (Matt. 19:8)¹³³

Quoting I Cor. 7:27, the Bishop of Alexandria exhorts, "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed". Whoever destroys this doctrine and seeks another, "proves to be an adulterer according to the holy Scripture."¹³⁴ The subject is discussed in course of reproving Eusebius of Nicomedia,¹³⁵ "for he had first the See of Berytus, but leaving that, he came to Nicomedia...contrary to the law."¹³⁶ He comments, "Having deserted his own without affection,

and holding of another without reason, he lost his love for the first in his lust for another." ¹³⁷ The bishop who leaves his see to take another is considered an adulterer just as St. Paul charges with adultery the husband who, bound to a wife, seeks to be loosed. Athanasius exclaims, "If this expression applies to a wife, how much more does it apply to a Church, and to the same Episcopate?!" It is remarkable that the first relation is called "love" while the second is considered lust. ¹³⁸ In addition, using the aforementioned story of the Levite (Judges 19), he emphasizes that marital bond is indissoluble. He shows himself joined to the Church of Alexandria as was the Levite to his spouse. Detaching him from his See is a kind of divorce which is likened to the crime of violating the wife of the Levite. Therefore, Gregory, the Arian Bishop of Alexandria who usurped his See, is described as "corrupting" the Canons and the faith of the Church. ¹³⁹

On the other hand, indissolubility of marriage is not absolute. The only exception addressed by the Lord is: "the cause of fornication." (Matt. 5:32) As far as we know, Athanasius did not discuss this subject directly. However, something about his attitude may be deduced.

Athanasius emphasizes man's free will and its importance in the response to God's grace. ¹⁴⁰ Dealing with the subject of marriage, he interprets the parable of the Sower, (Matt. 13:1-9) calling Christ "the Sower of grace and the Bestower of the Spirit." ¹⁴¹ He assures the part of free will saying, "It is in our power to behold the field which is sown by Him." The field is adorned, "not with virgins

alone,...nor with monks alone, but also with honorable matrimony and the chastity of everyone." ¹⁴² Chastity, then, is required of everyone, lest he may lose the grace of God. Then, the gift of Christian marriage needs to be accepted and freely lived, so it can be rejected and lost. Therefore, the advice of St. Paul is asserted, "Neglect not the gift that is in you," (I Tim. 4:14) ¹⁴³, and the Christian should not despise the grace by "delivering himself over to his lusts." ¹⁴⁴ In case of adultery, the gift of God who established marriage is refused and, therefore, the marital bond does not exist anymore. It is a tragedy of misusing good, i.e., evil; the human soul thinks that pleasure is "the very essence of good," and the members of the body are led to adultery instead of lawful procreation." ¹⁴⁵

Thus, if the way of God is that man shall be one flesh with his wife, ¹⁴⁶ by committing adultery, he cuts this relation in order to cleave to a harlot. St. Paul writes, "He who is joined to a harlot is one body with her, for: The two, He says, shall become one flesh" (I Cor. 6:16); but "he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him." (I Cor. 6:17) ¹⁴⁷ Adultery, then, is severing the "one flesh" of the "honorable marriage" ¹⁴⁸. Hence, by his free will, man can destroy marriage, rejecting its grace of sanctification. He is similar to the one who gives his body up to death when he offers himself willingly to the persecutors, for he is putting asunder "what God has joined." ¹⁴⁹ In addition, as mentioned earlier, Athanasius proves that every bishop is attached to his See and not allowed to leave it, like the husband for his wife, lest he should prove himself an adulterer. Therefore, when he says that Eusebius deserted his own See and held to another "without reason," probably he was bearing in his mind the

Lord's saying about adultery as the "reason" for divorce. (Matt. 5:32)

Fall and Marriage

Marriage, as God designed and meant it to be practiced, is the ideal state of the institution, regarding that Adam and Eve were living the ideal life.¹⁵⁰ They lived together at the beginning as having their minds "toward God in a freedom unembarrassed by shame."¹⁵¹ "Thus then ... the Creator fashioned the race of men, and thus meant it to remain"¹⁵². He "secured the grace given them by a law."¹⁵³ Yet, "whereas man sinned and is fallen, ... all things are in confusion: death prevailed ..., the earth was cursed, ... man, lastly, corrupted and brutalized."¹⁵⁴ The idea that the Fall occurred in a moment of time in the history of a married couple¹⁵⁵ suggests that after that moment, their marriage became different from God's design when He had established it.¹⁵⁶ Suspicion, then, is inescapable that sin has done something disastrous to this design.

In his *Contra Gentes*, Athanasius outlines the sequence of the Fall in respect of body and sexuality as follows:

The man who was first made ..., as long as he kept his mind to God and the contemplation of God, turned away from the contemplation of the body. But when, by the counsel of the serpent, he departed from the consideration of God, and began

to regard himself, then they not only fell to bodily lust, but knew that they were naked, and knowing, they were ashamed. But they knew that they were naked, not so much of clothing as that they were become stripped of contemplation of divine things, and had transferred their understanding to the contraries. For having departed from the consideration of the one and the true, namely, God, and from desire of Him, they had thenceforward embarked in divers lusts and in those of the several bodily senses. ¹⁵⁷

The Alexandrian Saint defines two effects of the Fall on the first couple: They "fell to bodily lust;" and, they "knew that they were naked". Now, how could both things affect, in a way, the state of marriage?

Before the Fall, the pair "turned away from the contemplation of the body," as long as they were keeping their mind to the contemplation of God. Then "having departed from the consideration of God", they fell into bodily lusts. ¹⁵⁸ Athanasius explains that the soul, "having departed from the contemplation of the things of thought, and ... pleased with the contemplation of the body, ... she was misled, and abused the name of good." ¹⁵⁹ In other words, men "devised and contrived evil for themselves." ¹⁶⁰ Applying this idea on the state of marriage, "the audacity of men, having regard not to what is expedient and becoming,...led away their hearing to disobedience, and their other members to adultery instead of to lawful procreation."

¹⁶¹ The good and original thing, then, was marriage and procreation, but adultery, the evil and the abuse of marriage, was devised after the Fall. ¹⁶²

If the first effect of the Fall was that they "fell into bodily lust," the second was that they "knew that they were naked." ¹⁶³ The man and his wife were both naked before the Fall. Once they "departed from the consideration of God and began to regard themselves, they recognized their nakedness, and then "were ashamed." ¹⁶⁴ This had a fatal attraction, affecting their ability to enter with each other into a relation motivated by self-sacrifice as before. The grace of God, then, is needed, for "they knew that they were naked, not so much of clothing as that they were become stripped of the contemplation of divine things." ¹⁶⁵ Nakedness of clothes would have a solution: God made tunics of skin and clothed them; (Gen. 3:21) but it is only the knowledge of God that might help them towards self-sacrifice, so that they would regard not themselves but each other. This would have been accomplished in "honorable matrimony," ¹⁶⁶ which attacks the Fall at its visible root, in the shame of nakedness, by directly confronting it on the holy ground of nuptial relationship. "They are no longer two but one flesh" (Matt. 19:6) within the honorable marriage and the "undefiled bed." (Heb. 13:4) ¹⁶⁷

Actually, the Fall affected the will of man, rather than marriage and the body. Man's intention has been wounded, on account of the perversion of values. The soul, being mobile by nature, "makes a novel use of her power, abusing it as a means to the pleasure she has devised, since it had

been created with free will." ¹⁶⁸ The blessing of marriage was not removed by the Fall, but its original power was "abused," and "the members of the body were moved in an opposite direction." ¹⁶⁹ "All things made by God are beautiful and pure." ¹⁷⁰ It is not conjugal desire that is evil but concupiscence; the desire to use and dominate others for the purpose of selfishness of one's pleasures, imagining that "pleasure is the very essence of good."

Athanasius follows, "When Adam had transgressed, his sin reached unto all men;" ¹⁷¹ but God did not revoke His benediction. "The hand which then fashioned Adam is also both now and ever fashioning and giving entire consistence to those who came after him." ¹⁷² The order of marriage which God had established is stable. "The organs have been severally fashioned by the Creator," so that they might be directed to the "lawful use which God permitted when He blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, 'Increase and multiply and replenish the earth.'" (Gen. 1:28) ¹⁷³ This blessing was not withdrawn after the Fall. "The patriarchs and saints of the Old Testament" were married, and "God blessed the people so that there might be no wives without children among them." In the Gospel also, "the angel told Zachary in advance that he would have a son to be called John." ¹⁷⁴

Marriage, then, is a blessing which not even the Fall took away, but although it survived, it was distorted. Like the image of God in man, it is effaced but not abolished; good in itself and surviving, it now needs to be restored. ¹⁷⁵ Adultery, on one side, and hardness of heart, and

consequently divorce as mentioned before, on the other, are aspects of distortion due to the Fall. However, God knows that "our weak nature needed the succor and salvation."¹⁷⁶ This is His plan to save man and restore marriage.

Christ and Marriage

Not willing that man made in His own image perish, the Lord became man, so that by assuming the flesh He might restore it wholly. Since then, "all things were set right and perfect; even earth received blessing instead of a curse."¹⁷⁷ Matter and the body are now sanctified and restored by the Lord; how about marriage?

The plan of redemption is a plan to call man back from what is his nature and restore him to the first grace.¹⁷⁸ God did not scrap His old design; but in taking man back to Himself, He recreates him. Thus, "since the first man Adam was altered, it became the Second Adam to be unalterable," so that sin might become "powerless in its assault against all."¹⁷⁹ Marriage, as mentioned before, was at the peak of God's original plan for the first man. It was then inevitable that under the new dispensation of the Second Adam, these old possibilities should be fully restored to marriage, in order that marriage returns to the pristine days before the Fall. Athanasius affirms that the Creator of marriage is Himself the Father of Christ who restored to creation, including marriage, its original blessing. In fact, Christ restored mankind "as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace."¹⁸⁰ Therefore, the doctrine of marriage, as the old

disposition, was not only ordered by Him to return to the first estate, but it became more blessed and sanctified. The ideal monogamy of Adam and Eve as it was "from the beginning" is to replace polygamy, infidelity and divorce; and the aspect of sanctification represented in marriage is also exalted when Christ condemns adultery even in the mind. He says, "Whosoever looks on a woman to lust after her, has already committed adultery." (Matt. 5:28) ¹⁸¹

Interpreting the parable of the Sower, (Matt. 13:1-9) Athanasius ascribes a prominent role to restoring and sanctifying marriage. Christ is the "Sower of grace and Bestower of the Spirit," ¹⁸² and the fruit of such a field is virginity on the one hand, and "honorable matrimony" on the other. ¹⁸³ Marriage then is a seed of grace and a fruit of the Holy Spirit by which the field, i.e. the Church, is adorned; "for in the Church, the word (of God) is manifold and the produce rich". The seeds are sown by Christ Himself, and the purpose is to "rescue all men generally to salvation." ¹⁸⁴ Thus, marriage, like virginity, is a way of salvation and a means of sanctification. In addition, Christ is the good example for both married and unmarried. "Not only should we bear His image, but we should receive from Him an example and pattern of heavenly conversation." ¹⁸⁵ The Archbishop of Alexandria states that all persons who arrange their lives in a manner worthy of Christ work especially to show His qualities and His grace. Then he notes that this applies to virgins and married persons alike. ¹⁸⁶

Nothing in the life of the Lord Jesus with regard to marriage betrays a repulsion of any kind. On the contrary,

He and St. Mary, along with His disciples, attended the marriage feast at Cana (John 2:1-12). The Lord instituted nothing at Cana, but His visible presence proclaimed that He is in the midst of them. "God blessed marriage by His presence at Cana in Galilee,"¹⁸⁷ and although He said to His mother, "My hour is not yet come," He at once worked the miracle.¹⁸⁸ The Lord, the Creator of marriage, is Himself Who blessed marriage by His presence and transferred the substance of water into wine.¹⁸⁹

Christ and the Church

While the Lord affirmed the unity of the spouses into one flesh and blessed the marriage of Cana, St. Paul clarified a new height of spiritual significance of the nuptial relation. Quoting the text of Gen. 2:24,¹⁹⁰ he proclaims Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church.¹⁹¹ As the husband becomes one flesh with his wife, the Son of God ceased to be only as God but became also man,¹⁹² so that He would be the head of His own body, i.e., the Church. (Col. 1:18)¹⁹³

The Lord is called the "Bridegroom," "a term proper to man's constitution."¹⁹⁴ He descended and contracted His divinity with flesh; and as man, "He took the senses of all men." He married the human nature, and became "the head of the Church," His Bride.¹⁹⁵ Athanasius interprets the incarnation as a spiritual union of the Lord with His mystical body.¹⁹⁶ Thus, he emphasizes marriage as a life-union rooted and grounded in a love that binds together two personalities in an enduring relationship. It is the sphere in

which the highest expression of human love between man and woman is experienced in a personal relationship, symbolizing nothing less than the mystical union between Christ and the Church, on whose behalf He gave His life, that "He might present the Church unto the Father, as the Apostle says, 'not having spot or wrinkle or any such things, but holy and without blemish'." (Eph. 5:27) ¹⁹⁷

The sanctity, then, of the union of man and woman in marriage recapitulates the union of Christ and the Church. Consequently, the fidelity and indissolubility of Christian marriage are based on this eternal hierogamy. Monogamy also is asserted. The Church, as Christ's body, is one; and any kind of division might injure her Bridegroom, as happened with the Levite of the Book of Judges. (Ch. 19) ¹⁹⁸ It follows naturally that man and woman must model themselves on the couple Christ and the Church, "observing the exhortation, 'Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love as Christ also hath loved us.'" (Eph. 5:1,2) ¹⁹⁹

The "conjugal harmony" now is a glimpse of the Lord's grace by which He brings the Church in harmony and in the bond of peace. ²⁰⁰ In marriage, a husband and wife have a special opportunity of understanding and sharing in the love Christ has for His Church, and the Church has for Him. Marriage is a seed of grace sown by Christ in the field of the Church; hence, the couple undertakes the voyage of holiness toward the eternal life in the joint body of matrimony. Both of them encourage each other in virtue. Athanasius relates that after his return from the second exile in the year 346

A.D., husbands and wives vie with each other in virtue, in prayer, and in helping widows and orphans. He sums up, saying, "In a word, so great was their emulation in virtue, that you would have thought every family and every house a Church, by reason of the goodness of its inmates, and the prayers which were offered to God."²⁰¹ The family is depicted as an icon of the Church.

In fact, the idea that the relationship typified the union of God with His people and Christ with His Church on the analogy of bridegroom and bride is well understood by Athanasius. He sees in the *Canticle* a description of God's relations with the Church or the individual soul. He writes, "The Spouse also, as it is written in the *Song of Songs*, was praying and saying, 'O that Thou wert my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother!' (Cant. 8:1)²⁰² He interprets, that Thou wert like the children of man, and wouldst take upon Thee human passions for our sake."²⁰³ Similarly, Christ is shown as the gentle Bridegroom willing to come to each one. "He does not force them but knocks at the door and says, 'Open unto Me, My sister, My spouse.'" (Cant. 5:2)²⁰⁴

Heavenly Call

Finally, marriage, like virginity, is described as a heavenly call. It is proclaimed through one of the "trumpets" by which God called the believers to the Paschal festival, in order that they may experience here a foretaste of the heavenly feast that is to come.²⁰⁵ The trumpets were used by

Moses "to call the children of Israel to the Levitical feasts."²⁰⁶ "The Lord spoke unto Moses saying, 'Make to thee two trumpets ... to call the congregation'." (Num. 10:1,2)²⁰⁷ "In the day of your gladness and in your feasts... ye shall blow with the trumpets." (Num. 10:10)²⁰⁸ Athanasius comments that the instruction about the trumpets is a wonderful and awesome thing for Israel to remind the people of the shock of the voices they heard on Mount Sinai. (Exod. 19:16) He advises:

Let us pass onto the meaning, and henceforth leaving the figure at a distance, come to the truth and look upon the priestly trumpets of our Savior, which cry out and call us at one time to a war, as the blessed Paul saith, ... (Eph 6:12). At another time the call is made to virginity, and self-denial, and conjugal harmony, saying to the virgins, the things of virgins; and to those who love the way of abstinence, the things of abstinence; and to those who are married, the things of an honorable marriage; thus assigning to each its own virtues and an honorable recompense. Sometimes the call is made to fasting, and sometimes to a feast.²⁰⁹

Marriage here is the call of a spiritual trumpet which is meant to be a way of spirituality and sanctity. It is put as equal to the other calls of the trumpets which "cry out and call" to the spiritual war by which "we wrestle ... with wicked spirits in heaven." (Eph. 6:12) The silver trumpets which were "typical" and symbolic, now are no longer

material. We are advised by Athanasius to "pass on to the meaning, and henceforth, leaving the figure at a distance, come to the truth". Marriage under the New Testament is the meaning and the truth of which the sound of the material trumpets are symbol and figure.²¹⁰ The call to marriage, then, is heavenly. Athanasius explains, "Let no man think of it as light and contemptible matter, if he hears the laws command respecting trumpets; it is a wonderful and fearful thing." He adds, "In order that the proclamation should not be thought as merely human, being superhuman, its sounds resembled those which were uttered when they (Israel) trembled before the mount. (Exod. 19:16)²¹¹ Marriage is a call of a "superhuman" trumpet; a heavenly and "honorable" call.²¹²

Accordingly, marriage is proclaimed by "the priestly trumpets of our Savior." It is the Lord Himself who calls to virginity and to marriage. The call is articulated by Him, proclaiming "to virgins the things of virgins, ... and to those who are married the things of honorable marriage." Both are two aspects of God's call.²¹³ The call of marriage, then, is a call of sanctification. The Lord assigned to it its "own virtues"; and whoever perseveres in practicing these virtues, may have "an honorable recompense." Marriage is not only sanctified but also a way of sanctification which has virtues and recompense. Athanasius puts marriage side by side with the other calls of trumpets which are in fact several means of sanctification, such as fasting and the feast. Above all, he mentions the grace of God itself as a call of one of the trumpets. He writes, "If thou wouldst listen to a trumpet much greater than all these, hear our Savior saying: 'In that last and great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried saying,

If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink'." (John 7:37) This saying is interpreted as the Lord calling all men "to be nourished with living bread, by faith and love to God."

²¹⁴ Marriage is a grace of God which sanctifies the human life. Lastly, "conjugal harmony" is combined with the Paschal joy, for marriage is proclaimed by one of these festival trumpets. The joyful life of marriage, then, is compared with the festival joy.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

The saying of Christ (Matt. 19:4-6) is the cornerstone of Athanasius' concept of marriage.²¹⁵ The passage recalls the account of creation found in Gen. 2, which speaks of the first couple as one flesh. The human reality of marriage in all its aspects is part of God's own wonderful creation; man is made male and female to be married into one flesh. This marital union necessarily implies monogamy and indissolubility of marriage. Marriage is restored from the sequence of the Fall by Christ, and elevated to be a reflection of the union between Him and the Church.

The Archbishop of Alexandria asserts the honor of marriage and its liberation from any false notion of several sectaries of abstainers. He quotes Heb. 13:4 to defend the institution, declaring that "Marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled". Asserting the role of the family in worshipping God, he urges all his people to "recognize the season of prayer, but especially those who are honorably married."²¹⁶

The house is a Church; a significant place of worship and sanctification.

IV.3 Sexuality

After having discussed the sanctity of marriage in general, we suggest that examining sexuality as a particular aspect of marital relations may help to show more clearly Athanasius' attitude to the institution as a whole.

Created by God

It is remarkable that the institutional words of marriage addressed by the Lord (Matt. 19:4-6) have no mention of procreation. In these words, we have the basis of the value of marriage. Beside showing its sanctity as created and blessed by God, the Lord's saying alludes to mutual love and conjugal relations. The Scriptural comment apparently makes clearer the intimacy and the totality of this sexual relation by pointing out the first consequence of creating man as male and female: "For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife, and the twain shall become one flesh." (Matt. 19:5)²¹⁷

Thus, the saying of the Lord does not promise that marriage will bring about "one heart," but it defines that the two individuals will become "one flesh." St. Paul expresses this idea explicitly when he says, "He who is joined to a harlot is one body with her, for "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh;" (I Cor. 6:16) in comparison to the other side of the fact: "He who is joined to the Spirit is one spirit." (I Cor. 6:17)²¹⁸

This intimate union is God's design from the beginning. It is God Himself who made them male and female and joined them together to "become one flesh."²¹⁹ God is not only the witness or guarantor, but also the ultimate author of sexuality. In another place, Athanasius proves that the relation of both different sexes is a revelation of God's wisdom. He states that God made things of opposite nature, but combined them in concordant harmony. The example of sexual relation is cited as follows: "Male and female are not the same, while yet they unite in one, and the result is the generation from both."²²⁰ Athanasius acknowledges sexual relations as an order of God implanted in the nature of living creatures as a sign of God's wisdom and goodness.

The doctrine that conjugal relations have their origin in the creative will of the one and true God is important to refute Gnostic and Manichaean condemnation of marriage and sexuality. On the other side, from the licentious and antinomians comes the apparently absurd suggestion that sexuality is good because it is valuable in itself as an experience that cooperates in completing the *pleroma* of the universe, or enables men and women to imitate the conduct of the spirits, or gives them a foretaste of the bliss of the next life.²²¹ None of these aims need marriage or procreation for their realization. Athanasius not only verifies the goodness of marriage and sexuality, but also insists that sexuality must be kept within marriage. The sexual permissiveness of the antinomians is condemned by the Savior who "begins with the thought of mind saying, 'whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath already committed adultery.'" (Matt.

5:28) It is also condemned by St. Paul: "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge." (Heb. 13:4)²²²

Blessed and Sanctified

Accordingly, God as the Creator of sexuality is concerned to keep this relation in purity and holiness. For example, God "corrected Abimelek because of Sarah." (Gen. 20:1-13)²²³ Thinking that Sarah was Abraham's sister, Abimelek sent and took her as a wife; but God appeared to Abimelek and said to him, "Indeed you are a dead man because of the woman whom you have taken, for she is a man's wife." (Gen. 20:2,3) God Himself is shown as caring for the sanctity of conjugal relation between Abraham and Sarah by directly interfering to prevent any kind of defilement.

Besides, Athanasius defends the sanctity of sexual organs and secretions. In his *Letter to Amun*, he treats two subjects: first, bodily excretion and the morality thereof, second, the "two ways of life," marriage and virginity. He writes to Amun in order to calm the over scrupulous conscience of some monks who were worried about "bodily excretion." Athanasius goes on further to discuss "the relation of sexes." He exclaims, "Tell me ... what sin or uncleanness there is in any natural secretion, as though a man were minded to make a culpable matter of the cleaning of the sputa from the mouth?" About sexual organs he adds, "What sin is there ... if the Master who made the body willed and made these parts to have such passages?"

The Saint proves that "there are certain necessary passages accorded to the animal body, to provide for the dismissal of the superfluity of what is secreted in several parts." He cites some examples "for the superfluity of the head, the hair and the watery discharges from the head, and the purging of the belly, and that superfluity of the seminitive channels." Then he concludes that all things made by God are beautiful and pure, "for the Word of God has made nothing useless or impure." Therefore, "if we believe man to be, as the divine Scriptures say, a work of God's hands, how could any defiled work proceed from a pure power?" Again, "If, according to the divine Acts of the Apostles, we are God's offspring (Acts 17:28), we have nothing unclean in ourselves." On the contrary, "we are a sweet savor of Christ in them that are being saved." (II Cor 2:15) ²²⁴ Accordingly, concerning sexual relations, he decides, "He is blessed who, being freely yoked in his youth, naturally begets children." This is the blessed and natural function of sexual organs; "but if he uses nature licentiously, the punishment of which the Apostle writes (Heb. 13:14) shall await whoremongers and adulterers." It is only in marriage that lawful use of sex in purity and sanctity is found. ²²⁵

The conclusion brought up to Amun is that sexual organs are good as "made of God," and there is nothing wrong with either involuntary secretion, or voluntary use within marriage. At the end of his letter, Athanasius advises Amun to strengthen the flocks under him, assuring that it is the devil who scatters secretly among them "thoughts of uncleanness and defilement." ²²⁶

Sexual Abstention

Athanasius relates, as mentioned before, that on his return from the second exile in the year 346 A.D., his people "ran together, and were possessed with unspeakable delight." He describes how they encouraged one another in virtue as follows: "How many wives persuaded their husbands, and how many were persuaded by their husbands, to give themselves to prayer, as the Apostle has spoken!"²²⁷ The saying of the Apostle, to which Athanasius alludes is: "Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control." (I Cor. 7:5)

Sexual abstention here does not amount to a sort of defilement affecting sexual relations; a defilement which would render a man unfit for prayer. It probably means a temporary cessation of all commonplace occupations, in order to dedicate oneself to the meeting with God. The same sense can be ascribed to Athanasius' call to the preparation of the Resurrection Feast: "Listen to the prophet; and ... be ready for the announcement of the trumpet, for he says, 'Blow ye the trumpet in Sion; sanctify a fast!'" (Joel 2:15)²²⁸ Abstention is a kind of fasting which goes side by side with prayer.

Moreover, it is stressed that this abstention is temporary, and arrived at by mutual agreement. If the relations between the spouses involved some defilement, abstention would rather be permanent and obligatory, but for

Athanasius, "marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled." (Heb. 13:4) ²²⁹ Therefore, this temporary abstention is a matter of asceticism; for "saints and they who truly practice virtue 'should mortify their members which are upon the earth.'" (Col. 3:5) ²³⁰ It is important to mention that the idea of temporary abstention is shown as a result of the spiritual zeal of the congregation who were "encouraging each other in virtue." Sexual abstention, then, is a period of dedication for the purpose of practicing several aspects of virtue.

Conjugal Love

Through his writings, Athanasius points to three kinds of sexual relations: natural, adulterous and marital. For the natural, he means the biological union between male and female, the result of which is "the generation from both of an animal like them." ²³¹ This kind of relation is a proof that "God is good and loving to mankind and caring for the souls made by Him." ²³² At the same time, it enables man to know the invisible God by His visible works, and glorify him when he sees the birth of infants from unlike sexes, considering the order and harmony produced out of the opposing forces. ²³³

The second kind of sexual relation, the adulterous, is described as "carried on stealthily," It is described as "using nature licentiously." ²³⁴ Such relation is selfish. When man departs from the consideration of God, he begins to regard himself, seeking pleasure with the contemplation of his body. Falling in love with pleasure, the soul uses the natural activities of the body moving its members in an opposite

way, to adultery and all other evils.²³⁵ The motive is essentially one of lust, of simple interest in one's own sexual pleasure. It is, then, selfishness, a negation of love.

The third and last kind is the marital relation which is combined with harmony and love. It is called "conjugal harmony" within the "honorable marriage."²³⁶ "For this cause, shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife."²³⁷ Love is the primary reason for the existence and permanence of marriage. The Archbishop of Alexandria condemns the man who deserts his wife without affection and joins to another. He states that "he loses his love for the first in his lust for another."²³⁸ It is love which gives the marital relation its meaning and purpose, as opposed to lust which is the motive of adultery.

Athanasius indirectly recognizes conjugal love when he cites two instances. First, he interprets the story of Job in a particular way. He sees that his wife had so great affection for him that the devil suggested that she might use her love to persuade Job to blaspheme God. Second, he blames Eusebius of Caesarea, for he left his own See and held possession of another's.²³⁹ Love of husband and wife is the ideal prototype for a bishop's love for his parish. It is known that Athanasius himself was attached to his people with a strong bond of love and affection.²⁴⁰

However, Athanasius, as far as we know, does not condemn pleasure of conjugal relations. On the contrary, when he refutes those who command to abstain from food, his principle is the saying of St. Paul, "Every creature of God

is good, and nothing is to be refused if it be received with thanksgiving." (I Tim. 4:4) ²⁴¹ We may infer that the pleasure of marital sexual relation, like that of food, is to be received thankfully from the hand of God.

Finally, conjugal love is a type of the love of Christ and the Church. He cries unto her saying, "Open unto me, my sister, my spouse." (Cant. 5:2) ²⁴² and she replies, "O that Thou wert my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother." (Cant. 8:1) ²⁴³ Moreover, family love is considered as a spiritual atmosphere which could lead to intimacy with God. It is seen as the possible start of a great development in charity. Uniting the twain into one body, love gives them increased interest in life and readiness to look beyond themselves and care for others. Christian families, under the auspices of Athanasius, were centers for helping widows and orphans who were hungry and naked. ²⁴⁴

Concluding Remarks

We conclude that, according to Athanasius, the natural sexual motive is good as created and blessed by God. Seminative secretions are pure as they come from the human body made by God who "made nothing useless or impure." The principle is: "To the pure all things are pure, but all the conscience and all that belongs to the unclean are defiled." ²⁴⁵ Consequently, marriage is the good locus and instrument of using sexuality in a good and sanctified way. The lawful use of the sexual organs is both procreation, "which God permitted," (Gen. 1:28) and the conjugal relation in itself

"which the Apostle approves." (Heb. 13:4) The human character of sexual desire and pleasure is not suppressed. Athanasius' teaching on marriage is addressed to actual human beings, who are not only committed to Christ, but also living in the conditions of the world. The divine and human reality of marriage is observed.

IV.4 Procreation

Marriage, then, is not seen merely as a means of procreation, but it is an end in itself; a union of two beings in one flesh, reflecting the union between Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, procreation, for Athanasius is the important fruit required of marriage, although he does not hold that childbirth is the only goal which justifies the institution.

God's Economy

Procreation is the divine economy established from the beginning for the succession of generations. After God had created man as male and female, He gave His command to the first couple to procreate saying, "Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth." (Gen. 1:28) ²⁴⁶ The process is explained as a peculiar order which announces the goodness of God who made all things beautiful and pure." ²⁴⁷ So that the human race might extend from one generation to the other by inheritance: "The son, having been begotten of a father who was a son, becomes accordingly in his turn a father to a son, in inheriting from his father that by which he himself has come to be." ²⁴⁸ It is a natural potentiality granted by God to man. "When the man comes to that age at which nature supplies the power, immediately, with nature unrestrained, he becomes father of the son from himself." ²⁴⁹ "Levi," for example, "was already in the loins of his great-grandfather (Abraham), before his own actual generation, or that of his grandfather." (Isaac; cf. Heb.

7:5-10)²⁵⁰ Therefore, all human beings are considered as "formed of earth"²⁵¹, even though it was only Adam who was formed out of dust, and the rest of mankind were begotten of him. Similarly, it is not Adam only who was created in the image of God, but his sons also were like him. "It is written concerning Adam and Seth, who was begotten of him, that he was like him after his own pattern."²⁵²

Sex and Procreation

Procreation is the natural function of sexuality. Athanasius writes, "He is blessed who, being freely yoked in his youth, naturally begets children"²⁵³. "The organs have been severally fashioned by the Creator," to enable man to fulfill His commandment, "Increase and multiply and replenish the earth." (Gen. 1:28)²⁵⁴ This process proclaims God's love and care. "God, being good and loving to mankind and caring for those made by Him, ... gave the universe the order it has."²⁵⁵ The birth of children from unlike parents reveals that "there is one power which orders and administers (the universe), ordaining things well as it thinks fit."²⁵⁶

To elaborate the relation of procreation to sexuality, Athanasius acknowledges the sexual passion needed for progeny. He writes, "Men's generation is one of human affection."²⁵⁷ In other words, "men beget passibly."²⁵⁸ In general, sexual relation within marriage "is honored and bed is undefiled;" (Heb. 13:4) but in case of procreation in particular, man have to "wait for periods."²⁵⁹ The Prelate of

Alexandria sees that the process of procreation creates a special relation between parents and their children. "The offspring of men are portions of their fathers, since the very nature of bodies is not uncompounded, but in a state of flux, and composed of parts; and men lose their substance in begetting, and again they gain substance from the accession of food." ²⁶⁰ Sexuality as the only means of procreation is the economy of God who ordained that every human being should be born of man and woman; "for in this way each of the saints also was begotten." ²⁶¹ As Saint Mary the "Bearer of God," is herself "really a human being," she was begotten in this way. She is "our sister as much as we all are from Adam." ²⁶²

God and Man Together

Procreation is a sort of cooperation between God and man. God created the first couple; and "after the Creator has begun them, men are begotten by succession." ²⁶³ This does not mean that procreation is a human process independent of God. It is not by man only that the race of mankind might increase and multiply, but God Himself creates through man. "The hand which then fashioned Adam is also both now and ever fashioning and giving entire consistency to those who came after him." ²⁶⁴ Therefore, God says by Isaiah, "All those things hath My hands made;" (Is. 66:2) and David says in the Psalm, "Thy hands have made me and fashioned me." (Ps. 119:73) ²⁶⁵ Athanasius comes to the conclusion that "God is He who fashions man in the womb." ²⁶⁶ He quotes, "Thus said the Lord thy redeemer, and He that formed thee

from the womb." (Is. 44:24) ²⁶⁷ Accordingly, in spite of its human part, procreation is ascribed to God as its grantor and giver. "On bearing Cain, Eve said, 'I have gotten a man from the Lord'." (Gen. 4:1) ²⁶⁸ "Cain was not purchased from without". He was born of her, yet considered as "gotten" from God. ²⁶⁹ Discussing the miracle of healing the man born blind, Athanasius concludes, "He that gave back that which the man from his birth had not, must be ... the Lord also of men's natural birth." ²⁷⁰ Childbirth, through natural, is ascribed to God as its Lord, for: "it is irreligious to suppose that God disdained, as if a humble task, to form the creatures Himself." ²⁷¹

God the Sanctifier

Through procreation, God not only creates but also sanctifies man. Athanasius writes, "Many for instance has been made holy and clean from all sin." ²⁷² He cites two other examples; "Jeremiah was hallowed even from the womb, (Jer. 1:5) and John, while yet in the womb, leapt for joy at the voice of Mary Bearer of God." (Luke 1:42, 44) ²⁷³ In addition, men are consecrated from the womb to their mission: "God Himself declares this to Jeremiah, 'Before I formed thee in the womb, I knew thee!'" (Jer. 1:5) and Isaiah witnesses, "Thus saith the Lord who formed me from the womb to be His servant." (Is. 49:5) ²⁷⁴

An interesting point is discussed by Athanasius: Is the state of sanctification exclusive to Adam who, though made

of the dust of the ground, was created directly by God's hand? The Saint answers:

Adam was created alone by God alone through the Word; yet no one would say that Adam had any prerogative over other men, or was different from those who came after him, granting that he alone was made and fashioned by God alone, and we all spring from Adam, and consist according to succession of the race, so long as he was fashioned from the earth as others, and at first not being, afterwards came to be. ²⁷⁵

Athanasius, however, allows "some prerogative to the 'Protoplast' as having been deemed worthy of the hand of God, but still it must be one of honor not of nature." ²⁷⁶ He explains that offspring of Adam are sanctified as created by God's hand as well as Adam himself, being of one nature with him. Consequently, although Adam received grace and was at once placed in paradise, he "differed in no respect, either from Enoch who was translated thither after some time from his birth on his pleasing God, or from the Apostle Paul who likewise was caught up to paradise after his actions." ²⁷⁷

Procreation, then, is sanctified, and defilement is not intrinsic in its nature, but it is man's free will that leads the members of the body "to adultery instead of lawful procreation." ²⁷⁸ It is noticeable that homosexuality is condemned as a crime against nature; ²⁷⁹ and all those who practice it, "live along with the basest and vie with the worst among themselves, as Paul said, 'For their women changed

the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet'." (Rom. 1:26,27) ²⁸⁰ The saying raises the question: Why is homosexual intercourse a "crime against nature," while heterosexual acts within marriage are permitted and approved? The answer is given in terms of the substantive difference between the two: Heterosexual intercourse can be fertile, but homosexual cannot. ²⁸¹

God as Father

The sanctity of procreation is stressed also as a type of the Divine birth of the Son from within the essence of the Father; a doctrine which Athanasius spent most of his career to defend and support. Family love is an icon of love of the Holy Trinity, for "the Only-begotten Son is acknowledged by the Father... saying, 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased'." (Matt. 3:17) ²⁸² In relation to man, God reveals Himself as Father in an affectionate love. The people of the Old Testament are addressed, "Is not thy Father that bought thee?," and "God that begot thee thou didst desert." (Deut. 32:6,18) ²⁸³ A further step is taken by the New Testament showing that it is not simply a question of metaphorical adoptive paternity with man but an ontological one. "Because of our relationship to His Body, we too have become God's temple, and in consequence are made God's sons." ²⁸⁴ The way of this sonship is baptism. Athanasius

declares, "As we who are all from earth die in Adam, so being generated from above of water and Spirit, in Christ we are all quickened." ²⁸⁵ Men are called now sons of God because of the presence of the Divine Son inside the believers. He adds, "Even in us the Lord is now worshipped, and beholders report, as the Apostle say, that God is in them in truth." (I Cor. 14:25) ²⁸⁶ Although men are numbered among God's works, they are made sons, and use the name of the Father who teaches, "when ye pray, say, Our Father who art in heaven." (Luke 11:2) ²⁸⁷ This is why the Lord is called "the second Adam," the new beginning of the human race. ²⁸⁸

Moreover, Athanasius likens the Divine sonship to the human. "The Son of God is so called according to the sense in which Isaac was son of Abraham." The reason is that Isaac is procreated from within his father; "for what is naturally begotten from any one and does not occur to him from without, that in the nature of things is a son, and that is what the name implies." ²⁸⁹ Thus, Athanasius recognizes the human conception and procreation, and puts the process in such a particular aspect of sanctification as a type of Divine sonship. Accordingly, God's fatherhood is a good pattern for man: "We men, for God is properly and alone truly Father of His Son, are also called fathers of our own children." ²⁹⁰ By this we should understand every paternal relationship of the parents towards the children. It is for this paternity that "every fatherhood in heaven and earth is named." (Eph. 3:15) ²⁹¹ Nevertheless, Athanasius asserts that although human procreation is a type of Divine sonship, there is a big difference between both of them. Regarding that human nature differs from God's nature, "so men's generation is in one way, and the Son is from the Father in another." Men

are created of matter; but God is "immaterial and incorporeal." ²⁹².

Family Ties

Athanasius acknowledges not only the affectionate love of the spouses, as cited before, but also family ties in general. He stresses God's commandment, "Honor thy father and thy mother," and, "He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death." (Matt. 15:4) ²⁹³ Accordingly, he blames the Jews who "established a contrary law, changing the honor into dishonor, and alienating to other uses the money which was due from the children to their parents." ²⁹⁴

In his *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius introduces the family of Antony as tied with bonds of love and harmony. He writes, "His parents were of good family ... , and as they were Christians, he also was reared in knowing naught else but them and his home." ²⁹⁵ In addition, he relates that when Antony was well known later, he showed compassion for the parents who brought unto him in the desert their sick children, acknowledging their feelings of love and care. ²⁹⁶ On his way from Alexandria to the desert, he "willingly stayed" to receive a woman who was crying to him asking for the healing of her daughter. ²⁹⁷

Finally, elaborating the evil deed of the devil who persuades men to follow him and deviate from the truth, the Bishop of Alexandria likens this to the case of one who

"desiring to kidnap the children of others during the absence of their parents, should put deception on the affections of the offspring and carry them far away and destroy them." ²⁹⁸ This is the worst thing Athanasius could imagine which might shock the parental compassion towards children. He also reflects his experience of affectionate ties with his family when he complains of the ill treatment of the Arians. He writes, "On account of their persecution, I have not been able to see even the parents whom I have." ²⁹⁹

Concluding Remarks

Procreation, then, is blessed for it is God's economy from the beginning when He created man as male and female, and God's commandment when He said, "Increase and multiply and replenish the earth." (Gen. 1:28) Although childbirth is a natural result of sexual intercourse, God is the essential factor as He is its grantor. He created the whole process which gives man this potentiality; and by His own hand, He fashions men and sanctifies servants in the womb. Therefore, God is called "the Lord of men's natural birth." ³⁰⁰ Family fertility and relations are acknowledged, and adultery and homosexuality are condemned.

IV.5 Marriage and Virginit

In the history of the first centuries of the Church, the word "virginit" means the state of celibacy of both men and women, as a choice for dedication to God's service.³⁰¹ Monasticism, as the new aspect of virginit, flourished at Athanasius' time as a result of the conversion of the Egyptian people who seized on the ascetic commandments of the Church with a new enthusiasm.³⁰² It should be noted that after Constantine legalized the Church and offered it a peaceful existence, the testimony that the martyrs had rendered to the Christian faith passed to monasticism.³⁰³ By the end of the fourth century, nearly five thousand monks were said to be settled at Nitria alone, and many thousands in the Nile Valley and the mountains of the Red Sea.³⁰⁴ Using the words of Athanasius, "the desert was colonized by the monks."³⁰⁵

Athanasius welcomed virginit and encouraged the monastic movement. In his *Vita Antonii*, Athanasius shows St. Antony (c.251-356 A.D.) as an example for the ascetics in foreign lands in their "training in the way of virtue."³⁰⁶ He calls Pachomius (c.290-346 A.D.) "our father;" and his disciple Theodore (d. 364 A.D.) "the father of the brethren." To Orsisius (d. 380 A.D.), the close friend of Pachomius, he sent letters;³⁰⁷ and Ammon (d. 350 A.D.), the well known ascetic of the Nitrian desert, was well known to him.³⁰⁸ The virgins also were admired; they are called "daughters of Jerusalem."³⁰⁹ While the monks carried their asceticism in the deep solitude of the desert, the virgins had their life within their parent's household or a special house under the

auspices of the Church. If they were to leave their home, it was only to participate in the worship of the local church; a designated group filling the Church and the streets with the chanting of the Psalms³¹⁰. Antony's sister was a part of this movement.³¹¹

New Value

The rise of monasticism brought a new aspect of morality into the fourth century Christian world.³¹² The life of sanctification is particularly achieved in a perfect way by those who practice self denial through virginity totally devoted to God.³¹³ The monks are those "who are established in the faith of God and sanctified in Christ, who say, 'Behold, we have forsaken all and followed Thee.'" (Matt. 19:27)³¹⁴ Antony and all those who are "God's own" are presented as "lamps to lighten all." The *Vita* is written, not only for the benefit of "the brethren that they may learn what the life of monks ought to be" but also for all people, even the heathen, "so that those who hear may thus know that the precepts of God are able to make men prosper and thus be zealous in the path of virtue."³¹⁵

Antony was about twenty when he went to seek solitude outside the village. He had to face the consequences of a young man's refusal to take the natural way of marriage. Yet, the *Vita* devotes little space to the description of sexual temptations. In fact, Antony's solitude was shown as the factor which brought perfection to his life.³¹⁶ It is his virtue, rather than his virginity, which was the reason, as well as the

proof, of "the fact that his fame has been blazoned everywhere."³¹⁷ Thus, he became an example for both married and unmarried. The bare memory and story of Antony is "a great accession of help."³¹⁸ No doubt, Athanasius' life was influenced by such a narrative.³¹⁹

Contenance as such is regarded as a new and distinctively Christian virtue. It is Christ alone who taught "temperance" and preached "virtue and self-control."³²⁰ By His death, Christ "has so rid men of the passions of the natural man, that whoremongers are chaste"³²¹. It is stressed that "those who receive the teaching of Christ live a chaster life" than others.³²² "In youth, they are self-restrained."³²³ Thus, virginity is possible for the believers, for "this holy and heavenly profession nowhere established but only among the Christians."³²⁴ Christ had such power in his teaching, that "even children not yet arrived at the lawful age vow ... virginity." No one else "taught concerning virginity, and that this virtue was not impossible among men."³²⁵

It is remarkable that virginity is not appreciated in itself as an unmarried estate, but on account of the life of sanctification and dedication to God which the virgin leads. "Self-control and the excellence of virginity" are motivated by God's love. "This no one doubts when he sees, ... for Christ's sake, the virgins of the Church keeping themselves pure and undefiled."³²⁶ Athanasius exclaims, "Is it not a great wonder to make a damsel live as a virgin, and a young man live in continence?"³²⁷ "Virtue in the virgins of Christ and in the young men" is that they practice the life of chastity and holiness.³²⁸

Thus, virginity is shown as a devoted life dedicated to God. "Our Lord bestowed that we should possess upon earth, in the state of virginity, a picture of the holiness of the angels." Accordingly, the Catholic Church has been accustomed to call those who attain this virtue, "the brides of Christ"; and the heathen who see them, express their admiration of them as "the temples of the Word" ³²⁹. Athanasius calls virginity "a divine virtue," "the wealth of the Church," and "a sacrificial gift reserved for God." He affirms that the virgin is a woman by nature, but by her free choice and firm resolution, she surpasses nature and lives an immortal life in a mortal body. ³³⁰

Claiming against the Arians as persecuting dedicated virgins who had been highly honored by the Emperors themselves. ³³¹ the Bishop of Alexandria writes that the Arians "have exceeded the madness of Pilate who pierced one of the Lord's sides with a spear." ³³² He relates, "Among them there was one virgin who ... had the Psalter in her hands" at the time when she was scourged. ³³³ It is noticeable that holiness itself was reported to be persecuted in married and unmarried alike. Thirty-four virgins and married women and men of rank were scourged by the Arians. ³³⁴ It is then the life of sanctification led by both kinds of believers which was persecuted.

Both marriage and virginity, then, are two aspects of the work of God's grace, and thus honorable and sanctified, for they are equally instituted by God, "so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation." ³³⁵ The married as well as the unmarried are members of the Church, the body

of Christ. It is the Lord's economy that "He might present the Church unto the Father not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:1) ³³⁶ Therefore, the field of the Church is adorned with virginity and "honorable matrimony." Both institutions are sown by the Savior Himself, "the Sower of grace and Bestower of the Spirit." ³³⁷ Thus, the life of sanctification is accessible to all; and when Christ orders to keep His commandments, He addresses Himself not only to monks and virgins but to all mankind. "To this intent He hath prepared many mansions with the Father." (John 14:2) "The dwelling-place is various ..., yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence." ³³⁸ Then, even though vocations differ, marriage and virginity are two ways of living the holy life.

The concept of Festal trumpets mentioned before may clarify this meaning. The trumpets have various calls to virginity and marriage, as well as to fasting and celebrating the feast. ³³⁹ Different vocations bring forward different aspects of sanctification. One vocation should not be thought of as leading to more holiness than the other, but as leading to holiness by a different path. "All persons who arrange their lives in a manner worthy of Christ," whether virgins or married, endeavor to show His grace, each in his own way. ³⁴⁰ Accordingly, monks are sanctified only "in Christ," ³⁴¹ and spouses persuade each other "to give themselves to prayer." ³⁴²

It is worth mentioning that Athanasius describes the relation of the virgins to Christ as a kind of marriage. Virgins are "brides of Christ;" and their limbs are "in a

special manner the Savior's own; for they had dedicated their body solely to the Savior." ³⁴³ He writes to virgins returning from Jerusalem, "She who is married has care for pleasing her spouse ... that nothing be allowed to come between them; so too the virgin in her relations with her Spouse." ³⁴⁴ The virgin is advised, "Direct all your zeal to Him who is your Husband." ³⁴⁵ Moreover, the indissolubility of marriage according to the rule: "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder," is applied also to the virgins. "If the Word Himself is united to virgins, isn't it necessary that this union be indissoluble and immortal?" ³⁴⁶ Athanasius, however, condemns the communal life of ascetics of both sexes dwelling together under one roof (*Syneisaktism*). By mixing habitual dealing with men with the ascetic life, these virgins actually stir up a more lively fire within themselves. He exclaims, "If a person who takes his neighbor's wife into his home, will not remain unpunished, (cf. Prov. 6:27-29) what will happen to him who seeks after the spouse of Christ and touches her? What will he suffer at the hands of the heavenly king?" ³⁴⁷

Between Marriage and Virginity

Honoring virginity does not mean that Athanasius degrades marriage. He considers that the ascetic and monastic life serve as a proof of the truth of the Gospel, and demonstrate the extent of perfection made available to human beings by the power of Christ. ³⁴⁸ The married Christians, even if they have not opted for the perfect life as did Antony, ³⁴⁹ still belonged to the righteous life of the

whole Church, whose married and unmarried members at the last day will hear God's call, "Come, blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom which is prepared for you." (Matt. 25:34)³⁵⁰

In a comprehensive piece, Athanasius defines the estate of marriage in comparison to virginity. After he announces marriage as "honorable," and "blessed," he comments:

There are two ways in life, as touching these matters. The one the more moderate and ordinary, I mean marriage; the other angelic and unsurpassed, namely virginity. Now if a man choose the way of the world, namely marriage, he is not indeed to blame; yet he will not receive such great gifts as the other.³⁵¹

The way of marriage is described as the more ordinary and moderate form, suited to normal human life. It is called "the way of the world," according to its convenience to all people. On the other side, virginity is "angelic and unsurpassed". It is "angelic," for "in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels." (Mark 12:25)³⁵² In heaven, human relations will not be fleshly any more; for "in Christ Jesus it shall be a new creation, and neither male nor female, but all and in all Christ." (Gal. 6:15; 3:28)³⁵³ Virginity is also "unsurpassed"; for while in marriage male and female "become one flesh," the virgin is "dedicated solely" to Christ, and her body is "in a special manner the Savior's own."³⁵⁴ If compared to marriage, virginity "has the

more wonderful gifts", for it is "rugged and hard to accomplish." However, there is no blame if a man chooses the ordinary way of marriage ordained to all people of the world, "yet he will not receive such great gifts as the others."

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Referring to the "Parable of the Sower," (Matt. 13:8; Mark 4:20) Athanasius writes to Amun that both marriage and virginity bring forth fruit, but if marriage may receive thirty fold, virginity "grows the perfect fruit, namely an hundred fold." ³⁵⁶ The idea of varieties of fruits between thirty fold and hundred fold, as discussed in his *Paschal Letters*, means that both are fruitful and within God's mercy which is not confined to any one of them. The mansions of the Father are prepared as various, "in proportion to the advance in moral attainment; yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence." ³⁵⁷ Actually, virginity gives the virgin, male or female, the chance for moral advance, as an estate of dedication to Christ without any commitments or occupations of daily life. This advance comes out of the spiritual perseverance of the individual, not as a privilege of mere celibacy. In addition, the various amounts of fruit is interpreted as a gradual growth of the life of sanctification, a way open to both married and unmarried. "A servant of the Lord should be diligent and careful", in order to be "productive, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred." ³⁵⁸ "For instance, those who were with Cleopas,(Luke 24) although infirm at first from lack of knowledge, yet afterwards were inflamed with the words of the Savior, and brought forth the fruits of the knowledge of Him." St. Paul brought forth an hundred fold, not as a result of his celibacy, but because he was seized by spiritual fire,

and "having experienced the grace, he became a preacher of God." ³⁵⁹ Again, the moral growth is a matter of zeal and spiritual strife, a chance open to everyone.

Therefore, virginity is left "to the free choice of those who desire it, so that they may attain its merit." ³⁶⁰ Indeed, God is the Sower of both virginity and marriage, but "in sowing, He did not compel the will beyond the power." ³⁶¹ It is up to the person to choose the ordinary way or that which is "rugged and hard to accomplish." ³⁶² The Lord "blessed marriage by His presence at Cana of Galilee" and "ordered that marriage was not to be torn apart, but that man should be content, in modesty, with one wife." At the same time, He spoke of virginity as a special doctrine, for "He did not mean to withdraw His support from marriage." When the Lord said that there are eunuchs "who have made themselves such for the kingdom of heaven," (Matt. 19:12) "He did not order becoming a virgin by any legal obligation, but He was open to those who would choose it freely". "Since then, marriage has not ceased ..., nor the marriage at Cana was stopped." ³⁶³ Then, "there is true happiness if a young man establishes a home and brings children into this world; but there is greater happiness being a virgin and espousing Christ Himself." Therefore, "if virginity is distinguished as a priority for some, marriage comes next to it for others who find their glory in it." ³⁶⁴

Nevertheless, those who live in virginity "should not look down upon those who are in a chaste marriage." ³⁶⁵ However, the idea of the possibility of temporary abstention (I Cor. 7:5) opens the door for the married also to experience

a sort of asceticism.³⁶⁶ In addition, monks who had previously been married and became "fathers of children", could reach the ascetic life.³⁶⁷ Athanasius comes to a rule, "let a man, whatever he is, strive earnestly; for the crown is given not according to position, but according to action."³⁶⁸ If marriage has the law for its basis, as it is written, "What God hath joined together let not man put asunder", virginity "lies beyond the law."³⁶⁹ Therefore, while virginity is a special vocation, marriage is the "moderate and ordinary" one.³⁷⁰

St. Mary The Virgin

The Lord Jesus, "while Son of God by nature, is ... of the flesh of the Holy Mary."³⁷¹ St. Mary was really a human being, but as a virgin, "she is the picture of virginity," and "whoever would desire to be a virgin should consider her."³⁷² If the Lord "fashioned His body for Himself from a virgin," the reason is not to reproach marriage, but to "afford to all no small proof of His Godhead," by seeing a body proceeding forth "from a virgin alone without man."³⁷³ Athanasius exclaims, "Which of the righteous men and holy prophets, recorded in the divine Scriptures, ever had his corporeal birth of a virgin only; or what woman has sufficed without man for the conception of human kind?"³⁷⁴ He concludes that the Lord was born of a virgin, "and not like others of man and woman," to refute "the imagination of some who say that the Word came upon one particular man, the Son of Mary, just as He came upon each of the prophets."³⁷⁵

St. Mary is called the "Ever Virgin." She remains continually virginal, being the type for whoever comes after her. Those who say that she took a husband try to "exaggerate the benefits of marriage, so that virginity does not appear as a reproach" for their choice of the marriage estate.³⁷⁶

Concluding Remarks

Marriage and virginity, then, are two ways of the kingdom of God. All married and unmarried are members of the Church, the body of Christ; and all of them are called to the holy life. The mercy of God is ready to cover all kinds, and the mansions of the Father are open to all people. There is no idea of superiority of one over the other; for no way of life in itself can bring man to sanctification without cooperation of man and God. Hence, virginity is not obligatory but rather a special spiritual gift given by the Lord to those who desire it.

When Athanasius encouraged virginity and welcomed monasticism, he meant, as a pastor, to inflame the zeal of his people for virtue, and to show that the life of sanctification is available for all humankind by the power of Christ. The power which enables the virgin to control his or her own instinct and dedicate life to worship, is the same which converts adulterers to chastity, and helps the married couple to lead a holy life. It is "the chastity of each one."³⁷⁷ Chastity is the goal of the Lord for all believers, whether married or unmarried. Therefore, the Lord established marriage "from the beginning;" and "united Himself to virgins."³⁷⁸ While monks and virgins are able to dedicate their life to prayer, spouses are able to make every house a domestic church.³⁷⁹

IV.6 Marriage and Eschatology

During the early Christian era, the expectation of the imminent "Parousia," the second coming of Christ, affected the attitude of marriage. If the human race was soon to end, there was no need for marriage and procreation. This idea made marriage and family of secondary importance. Accordingly, as the Parousia came to be understood as delayed, earthly ties could be tolerated as long as they did not contradict the requirement of the coming of the heavenly kingdom bound to come sooner or later. Nevertheless, Christian writers must have felt the tension when attempting to give relevance to familial considerations.³⁸⁰

Athanasius faced a society which understood afterlife to be contrary to marriage and family life. Such an attitude was strong not only in Egypt but in neighboring countries.³⁸¹ The awareness that the end of time was approaching and the fashion of this world was passing away made all things and institutions to be considered as without significant purpose. Insofar as it might be for children and survival of the world, why marry if history was soon to end? Marriage, as an affair of this life, seemed unnecessary for the preparation of the eternal kingdom. In a life of expectation and preparation, celibacy and sexual abstinence were preferred rather than marriage and procreation.³⁸²

The tension between the call of the eschatological kingdom and the fact of normal relationships was stressed by the admixture of Hellenistic elements which held the

material world and the marital relationships as inferior. The *Gospel of Thomas*, well known in Egypt, proclaimed that only those belong to the kingdom who have renounced all sexual activity.³⁸³ The *Second Letter of Clement* interprets a logion from the *Gospel of the Egyptians* as follows: When the Lord says, "The male with the female, so neither male nor female," He means that a brother does not think of the femininity of his sister, and she does not think of his masculinity. The Letter adds the Lord's saying: "When you do this, my Father's kingdom will come." Thus, when continence is practiced by all, the kingdom is then sure to arrive.³⁸⁴

Gnostics and Manichees carried out this idea further. They claimed to find clear support in certain passages of the New Testament whose meaning they interpreted in a way to serve their own purpose. For instance, assuming that they now live in the new age of the kingdom, the Gnostics interpreted the Lord's disapproval of the man invited to the banquet who excused himself for he had married a wife (Luke 14:20) to mean that those who marry are excluded from the eschatological banquet of the world to come.³⁸⁵ The Gnostic Julius Cassianus says, "The subjects of earthly kings both beget and are born; `but our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior'." (Phil. 3:20)³⁸⁶ The Marcionites too decided to abstain from marriage lest they fill the world made by the Creator-God. They held that abstention from meat and marriage is actualizing the future eschatological restoration of man to Paradise.³⁸⁷ For the Manichees, procreation means further enslavement of the Light. Strict observance of Manichaeism

commandments means the end of the world, lest the Power should dwell in matter for a longer time.³⁸⁸

Indeed, Clement of Alexandria rejects the Gnostic eschatology from which repudiation of marriage and procreation proceeded. He proclaims the fundamental goodness of this world and its continuation "from generation to generation."³⁸⁹ Nevertheless, when he speaks of the perfect life of the true Gnostic, he says that his passionate life of living with his wife as with a sister is a realization of the resurrection state on earth.³⁹⁰ He considers that the eschatological dimension of Christian life is the clue to marital ethics. He writes, "We ought to behave as strangers and pilgrims; if married, as though we were not married, ... if procreating children, as giving birth to mortals."³⁹¹ According to Origen, the ideal marital relation is that the spouses should avoid all carnal passion and imitate the eternal love of Christ for the Church. He opts for a conjugal love which must tend more and more toward the spiritual; a kind of marriage convenient to the life to come.³⁹²

Athanasius, as mentioned before, asserts the goodness of the Creator and the purity of creation. "All things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the Word of God has made nothing useless or impure."³⁹³ The Creator is the same good God of the Old Testament, and the artificer who is not "distinct from the Father of Christ."³⁹⁴ At the same time, he emphasizes the stability and harmony of the created world. By God's will, "all things simultaneously fall into order, and each discharge their proper functions" in.³⁹⁵ To confirm his argument, Athanasius uses both the Bible and philosophy.

The book of Psalms says, "Thou hast laid the foundation of the earth and it abideth. The day continueth according to Thine ordinance;" (Ps. 119:90) ³⁹⁶ and Plato testifies that the author of the universe is responsible to keep it from "going down to the place of chaos." ³⁹⁷

The day, then, must continue, and the earth must last. When the disciples asked the Lord, "When shall the end be, and when wilt Thou be present?," He stopped their inquiry and said to them, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in His power." (Acts 1:7) ³⁹⁸ The Parousia should not impede the earthly affairs of daily life. Men must continue "eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage," as in the days that were before the flood. Indeed, no one knows the time of the end, exactly like the people at the days of Noah, who "knew not until the flood came;" (Matt. 24:39) ³⁹⁹ but the believers must be prepared for the day. The Savior says, "Be ye ready and watch, for He cometh at an hour ye know not." (Matt. 24:42; Mark 13:35) ⁴⁰⁰

The Lord describes His second coming saying, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven in the glory of the Father." (Matt. 26:64) ⁴⁰¹ He will appear as "Son of Man" in a human body; for "He ascended as man carrying up to heaven the flesh which He bore;" ⁴⁰² but "no longer in lowliness but in His own glory." ⁴⁰³ "He is to come no more to suffer, but thenceforth to render to all the fruit of His own Cross, that is, the resurrection and incorruption" ⁴⁰⁴. The human race will share the resurrection of the body. Men "do

not perish by dissolution, but sown on earth, shall rise again." (I Cor. 15:35) ⁴⁰⁵ Then everyone will have his eternal reward: "Everlasting fire and outer darkness" are for those who have done evil; but "for the good, the kingdom of heaven." ⁴⁰⁶

It is remarkable that the Kingdom is shown as a banquet, a nuptial procession. The point of the parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins (Matt. 25:1-13) is to show that the Church must be ready for the Lord when He comes as her Bridegroom. ⁴⁰⁷ If the believers "partake of the living doctrine," they come "to the divine and incorruptible banquet", where "there is laid up both a crown and incorruptible joy." ⁴⁰⁸ Accordingly, they are advised, "to watch for the coming of "the Son of Man." (Matt. 25:13) ⁴⁰⁹

It is true that in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels." (Mark 12:25) The reason, for Athanasius, is that "in Christ Jesus it shall be a `new creation,' and `neither male nor female, but all and in all Christ'." (Gal. 6:15; 3:28) ⁴¹⁰ Athanasius does not mean by citing Mark 12:25 to discuss any positive meaning of marriage, but simply to deny any physical understanding of the life to come. Such interpretation is similar to that of Clement: "The Lord is not rejecting marriage, but ridding the minds of the expectation that in the resurrection there will be carnal desire." ⁴¹¹ No longer do the believers abide on earth, and no longer shall they fear the temptation of sin. ⁴¹²

It is true also that marriage and the family are only temporary here on earth. When the Kingdom has finally

been established, there will be no more marriage. Therefore virginity, if dedicated to God, is called "angelic"; while marriage, although blessed, is "the way of the world."⁴¹³ Yet, the glory of heaven is prepared for all those "who readily hearken to the goal of their high calling."⁴¹⁴ If virginity "has the more wonderful gifts," that is because it is "rugged and hard to accomplish."⁴¹⁵ In the last day, all believers, both married and unmarried, will be accepted to the Kingdom. Married persons, however, might wait for the end in faith and hope, in the intimate company of a believing spouse, helping each other in the way of God, and transferring every house into a church.⁴¹⁶ "All of us are within the wall;"⁴¹⁷(37) for "we must all stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, that each one may receive according as he hath done in the body, whether it be good or bad." (II Cor. 5:10; Rom. 14:10)⁴¹⁸ The dwelling-place of heaven "is various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment."⁴¹⁹

It is remarkable that the Easter Festival appears in Athanasius' *Paschal Letters* as a mystical anticipation of the eternal and heavenly feast. It is heavenly and eternal; "a symbol of the world to come."⁴²⁰ So, all Christians are welcomed to the Festival. The trumpets of the Feast call for "virginity" and "honorable marriage."⁴²¹ Therefore here below, all believers, married and unmarried alike, receive the pledge of everlasting life in heaven.⁴²² They are not alone in their joy, for the whole "Church of the first born" (Heb. 12:23) rejoices with them.⁴²³ All saints, including those of the Old Testament, most of whom were married, celebrate the feast with them.⁴²⁴

We conclude that the Bishop of Alexandria wished his people to trust the good Creator and His good creation. Waiting for the eschaton, they may lead their daily life in the peace of God, whether their call is to marriage or to virginity. The world is created to continue from generation to generation until the Parousia. The body will rise and be glorified at the end of days, through Christ who assumed a true human body in which He will appear in glory.



Such is Athanasius' attitude to body, and his view on marriage, sexuality, procreation, virginity and eschatology. The next chapter offers a sociological analysis of the subject.

Chapter V

A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Describing Christianity in the fourth century, Troeltsch says, "The creation of the Church is the real great sociological achievement of this period."¹ The Christian faith, which at first was conceived only in religious terms, is then transformed into a social organization within life as a whole. The religious sociological idea is developed, and Christian life is no more simply perceived as a sublime ideal about the preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of God.² Thus, we are led from the general religious idea to social organization. When the Church begins to be constituted, she is obliged to lay down limits concerning the life of the State and of the society around her, and within her borders she must put her own social situation in order.

This is the secular aspect of the Church in which the central point of religion is externalized. The Divine and the human elements were combined; and this combination makes it easy to invest a human order with the character of Divine grace. The religion of Christ was then institutionalized, and the grace synthesized with worldly realities; with culture, society and political power. This institutionalization affected the life of the society, and in one way or another, breathed a peculiar spirit into the existing world order. The social life was accepted by the Church, and

the ideal of the Gospel lived on in both ideas and institutions. It lives on in the ideas of salvation and sanctification, and institutions pleasing to God now exist within this world. This is a corollary of the belief that the ordinary life of humanity, in spite of its sin, is full of traces of the Divine goodness.

According to Athanasius, "all things made by God are beautiful and pure." ³ The dividing line is not drawn between the Church and society, but between the thought of sanctification and the "thoughts of uncleanness and defilement", for "to the pure all things are pure, but the conscience and all that belong to the unclean are defiled." (cf. Tit. 1:15)" ⁴ Indeed, it was impossible for the Church to keep out of the way of public life and the State; but gradually a more clearly defined position had to be adopted. Under Constantine and his sons as Christian emperors, moreover, this became absolutely necessary.

Nevertheless, the driving force of the whole course of this development was religious. The Church, especially before Constantine, had no direct social program to transform society. She could deal with social problems and institutions directly only for herself and in the circle within reach of her influence. She was content to do within her community that which she had no power to do outside. Her new social order was thus confined to the Christian community. Actually, she had accepted the existing conditions, and had only attempted to regulate them, but neither before nor after did she attempt to transform the whole social system. ⁵

The attitude of the Church towards the family, the innermost heart of the system, was different. While the inner fundamental principles of the Church did not penetrate very deeply into the public life, they were strongly felt in family life. The influence of the Church and her conservative teaching was felt first of all within the family, which the Church regarded as the basis of the whole society ⁶. Now, the grace of sanctification is seen to coalesce with the worldly practice of marriage. This process involves mainly an institutionalization of Christian sanctification through Christianization of the institution of marriage.

Four aspects will be distinguished and discussed in this chapter, these are:

1. legal,
2. moral,
3. ascetic, and
4. socio-anthropological.

V.1 Legal Aspect

The Church, then, found it impossible to ignore the existence of the State and social institutions. The Christians were to respect the existing regulations, and to prove themselves good citizens. It is known that during successive periods of persecution, the Christians were charged with disloyalty to the Roman Empire. Christianity was considered against the national religion in the eyes of the ruling classes of the Empire. Its members could be punished as Christians, regardless of whether they were otherwise law abiding persons.⁷ In 112 A.D., Pliny writes to the Emperor Trajan that Christians are an irritant, obstinate and recalcitrant, and for that reason alone worthy of punishment;⁸ and in 250 A.D., Decius ordered Christianity to be eliminated as a contrary force disrupting concord between the gods and humankind.⁹ Under Diocletian, Christians were dismissed from the army and imperial service, and in 303 A.D., the great persecution was edicted against Christians as being rebellious to national traditions, and blaming them for every disaster.¹⁰

On the other hand, it was taught that the State is an ordained authority which the Christian must obediently consider.¹¹ Athanasius repeatedly advises, "Render to all their duties." (Rom. 13:7)¹² No doubt, he had in his mind the whole saying of St. Paul (Rom. 13:1-7) to respect the laws of the State. Since all institutions belonged to the State which was the support of all of them, it was impossible for the Church to hold a negative or even an indifferent attitude toward it. The State was the only possible source of law as it

had evolved its own peculiar conception of the legal relation between itself and society. ¹³ It was regarded as a Christian duty to recognize the laws of the State, with the result that the laws which corresponded with the natural law were to be accepted, while those which appeared to be tainted by sin and idolatry were to be rejected. ¹⁴ Evidently, the Christians, both before and after Constantine, accepted the Roman law of marriage as being the law of the land and not against their doctrine. ¹⁵

We have no reason to insure that the early Church took part directly in the marriage of the faithful ¹⁶. Nevertheless, although little is known about the earliest practice of marriage in the Coptic Church, ¹⁷ it is possible to say that she had, from the very beginning, a mystical and theological concept of marriage. The priest had a function which probably went back to the role assumed by the old Egyptian priest in the pagan marriage ceremonies. ¹⁸

In general, it is felt from the testimony of the Alexandrian Fathers that the right and proper course of the Christian for honorable marriage is to seek the benediction of the Church. Clement writes, "The marriage that is consummated according to the word (of God) is sanctified, if the union be under subjection of God." ¹⁹ For Origen, "It is God who united the two into one, ... therefore those who have been united by God have received a grace." ²⁰ Then he indicates that the harmony of the spouses is a fruit of the grace of marriage and of prayer. ²¹ Most probably, the doctrine of marriage as a sacrament was defined later. It is remarkable that the *Euchologion or Sacramentary* which is

ascribed to Serapion, the Bishop of Thmuis, does not include a special prayer for marriage. The book is certainly Egyptian and dates from the fourth century, probably around 350 A.D. It consists of thirty prayers; eighteen of them are connected with eucharistic liturgy, seven with baptism and confirmation, three with ordination, and two with the blessing of oil and funerals ²². About the year 402 A.D., Synesius of Cyrene writes, "God and the law and sacred hand of Theophilus gave me my wife." ²³ It was possibly a Christian wedding ceremony performed by the Patriarch of Alexandria.

In the fourth century, the Eucharist, in connection with marriage, was already celebrated in Alexandria, while in Rome, it was not known until the fifth century ²⁴. Probably this is why Athanasius in his first Pastoral Letter combines marriage with communion, expressing in a symbolic way that the trumpets of Easter Festival which call to marriage are essentially a call to the Paschal Eucharist as the climax of the Feast. ²⁵

As a great leader living under the Roman Empire, Athanasius, no doubt, was concerned with Roman law. According to Sulpitius Severus, Athanasius added to his other studies that of the Roman law. ²⁶ This fact is evident in his works. For example, when he assaults the immorality of the Pagans he writes, "From Zeus they have learned the corruption of youth and adultery, from Aphrodite fornication, from Rhea licentiousness, ... and from other gods other like things which the laws punish." ²⁷ Since the Bishop of Alexandria acknowledges the regulations of Roman law

which condemn adultery and homosexuality, he evidently considers marriage as a legal institution.

However, Athanasius' viewpoint on marriage was pastoral and moral, rather than theological or juridical. Nevertheless, even though marriage had not yet been developed into the shape and rite of sacrament as known in the present, the institution, according to Athanasius, is seen as legal and blessed. He writes that sexual members must be directed not to adultery but to marriage and "lawful procreation."²⁸ This is the "lawful use" of the organs which have been differently fashioned by the Creator.²⁹ Marriage is a blessing of God who "blessed Adam and Eve and said to them, Increase and multiply and replenish the earth." (Gen. 1:28)³⁰

As mentioned before, monogamy and indissolubility are legal aspects of the institution of marriage.³¹ The ideal monogamy of Adam and Eve is the prototype of marriage "from the beginning". Man is commanded to "leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife." (Matt. 19:5)³² The claim of divorce is against the law, for "what God has joined together let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:6)³³ Therefore, whoever leaves his wife for another "proves adulterer" according to St. Paul: "Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed." (I Cor. 7:27)³⁴

Actually, legal marriage was attacked on religious grounds by several kinds of Encratites in general and Gnostics and Manichees in particular. It is noticeable that Athanasius combined Mani with Marcion, Basilides and

Valentinus.³⁵ In his time, the Nile valley was filled with such abstentionists. Gnostic groups still clung to the fringes of the local churches, and the Manichaean Elect moved easily up and down the Nile.³⁶ They considered themselves to be the true Christians, and condemned the members of the Church for being unfaithful to the true doctrine of Christ. Although savagely repressed by Diocletian, the Manichees were able to survive underground by keeping their faith secret under the guise of Christianity.³⁷ Probably, it is them to whom Athanasius alludes when he states that their thoughts are a crafty suggestion of the devil "under the show of purity."³⁸ Beside his effort of refuting them, it is possible that he encouraged and helped both Bishop Serapion of Thmuis and Didymus the Blind to write against them.

The influence of such views reached the desert.³⁹ Therefore, Athanasius had to challenge the followers of Hierakas, the Egyptian ascetic and the influential contemporary of Antony and Pachomius. Hierakas wrote in Coptic as well as in Greek, and enjoyed the reputation of an inspired exegete who knew the Scriptures by heart. He doubted whether married persons had any place in God's Kingdom. In his opinion, celibate persons were the only Christians who would be saved. He believed that the uniqueness and relevance of Christ lay in the fact that He had abolished marriage and made virginity essential for salvation.⁴⁰ Athanasius writes, "Hierakas must be treated in this manner [like the sown seed of the parable that is trampled underfoot], for he says that marriage is bad because virginity is better." He comments, "This way of thinking is like saying that sunshine is bad because angelic light is better; that moon is bad because sun is better."⁴¹ He asserts

that nothing in the Scripture can support his opinion. He calls him "an enemy of purity," for "he intends to show that whoever insists that marriage is the only place for sexual relations is an enemy of virginity."⁴²

Athanasius defends the legality of marriage, refuting the objections of schismatic groups of abstainers. The pleasure of those people "is to gainsay what is said right or rather what is made by God." They stir "vain questions and frivolities which one ought to put aside". To reach their goal, they "prevent even a saying of Gospels, alleging that 'not that which goeth in defileth a man, but that which goeth out.' (Matt. 15:11) Athanasius answers that certain people were in doubt about meats; whereas the Lord lays down that not what goes in defiles man but what goes out, thus asserting that defilement goes out from the heart where there are the evil and profane thoughts. He adds that St. Paul teaches the same thing more concisely saying, "but meat shall not bring us before God." (I Cor. 8:8) Against their claim that sexual secretion is sin and uncleanness, he exclaims, "What sin is there if the master that made the body willed and made these parts to have such passages?" "If we believe man to be, as the divine Scriptures say, a work of God's hand, how could any defiled work proceed from a pure power?" Were these members and the secretions means of sin and crime, God might not create them by His own hands. The Alexandrian Pastor asks again, "What sin or uncleanness there is in any natural secretion, as though a man were minded to make a culpable matter of the cleaning of the nose or the sputa from the mouth? We may add also the secretions of the belly, such a physical necessity of animal life." Then he concludes, "One might reasonably say: no

natural secretion will bring us before God for punishment." Referring to medicine, he saw that medical men may support him on this point. "They tell us that there are certain necessary passages accorded to the body to provide for the dismissal of the superfluity of what is secreted in our several parts." He cites some examples of "the superfluity of the head, the hair and the watery discharges from the head, and the purging of the belly, and that superfluity again of the seminative channels." ⁴³

Athanasius insistently defends, "We must grapple with the objections of evil persons." They may say that if sexual organs have been differently created by God, "then there is no sin in their genuine use." Now, what is meant by "genuine use?" Sexual organs are actually used in marriage as well as in adultery. Which of them is lawful? Athanasius wonders, "What do you mean by use? That lawful use which God permitted when He said, 'Increase and multiply and replenish the earth,' (Gen. 1:28) and which the Apostle approves in the words, 'Marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled,' (Heb. 13:4) or that use which is public, yet carried on stealthily and in adulterous fashion?" ⁴⁴

In order to prove that sexuality is legal only in marriage, even though it is similar in both marriage and adultery, he shows that in other matters of life also, "we shall find differences according to circumstances; ... so that the same act is at one time and under some circumstances unlawful, while under others, and at the right time, it is lawful and permissible." For example, "it is not right to kill, yet in war it is lawful and praiseworthy to destroy the enemy;

accordingly not only are they who distinguished themselves in the field held worthy of great honors, but monuments are put up proclaiming their achievement." He follows, "The same reasoning applies to the relation of the sexes. He is blessed who, being freely ⁴⁵ yoked in his youth, naturally begets children." ⁴⁶

Sexual relation, then, is legal within marriage, while illegal in case of adultery. ⁴⁷ Therefore, marriage is an awful commitment. It is dangerous when the partner is unfaithful. "The punishment of which the Apostle writes (Heb. 13:4) shall await whoremongers and adulterers." ⁴⁸ Athanasius affirms, "Marriage has its statute born in the law, seeing that for him who violates its structures, say an adulterer, death is reserved." (cf. Lev. 5:10; Deut. 22:26) ⁴⁹ Adultery is a sequence of sin whence the soul of man "abuses her power," moving the sexual members to adultery instead of "lawful procreation." ⁵⁰

Thus, although marriage is not a sacrament as yet, it is seen by Athanasius as not only legal and indifferent but also "blessed" and "honored." ⁵¹ It is pure, since "all things made by God are beautiful and pure, for the Word of God has made nothing useless or impure." Furthermore, it is a metaphor of the union of Christ with the Church. ⁵² In time, Christianity took away marriage from the civil sphere and made of it a sacrament, but this was yet to come.

V.2 Moral Aspect

It is certain that Christian sanctification could not be achieved without morality. Faith alone does not suffice. Athanasius writes that he who believes "is also diligent in virtuous practices. ... He is always mindful of God and forgets Him not, and never does the deeds of death."⁵³ The believers are advised to be "not hearers only but doers of the commandments of the Savior."⁵⁴ They must "abide in that which is good, without being negligent, ... until the Lord comes who searches out hidden things!" (I Cor. 4:5)⁵⁵ Faith and godliness are so closely allied that they can be considered sisters. Anyone who believes in the Lord is godly; for "faith is yoked with godliness."⁵⁶ The method of great teachers, according to Athanasius, is to give the knowledge of faith first, then they point to things that needed to be corrected. They call the people to believe in the Lord first, and then to do what He told them. Moses (Deut. 6:4), Hermas (*The Shepherd*, Mandate I), and St. Paul (II Tim. 2:8), used this method.⁵⁷

Now, morality, virtue and good behavior are defined systematically in terms of natural law, a theme borrowed from the Greek culture, particularly Stoicism. It was the common teaching of the Stoics that nothing at all takes place contrary to "universal nature;" and that things which are contrary to nature do not take place but seem to take place.⁵⁸ The entire universe is governed by the divine "Logos" who organizes all things according to the rational laws of nature. God, for the Stoics, is related to the universe as the soul is to the body.⁵⁹

Chance and accident have no place in the Stoic system, for in the laws of nature, all events are bound by strict rules of cause and effect. It was noticed by the Stoics that some changes occur in nature which the principle "nothing produces nothing" could not explain. Since the Logos rules all things, there can be no recourse to accident or chance. As a way out of this dilemma, the Stoics adopted as a solution the doctrine of "logoi spermatikoi," the seminal seeds of the Logos, which contain the germs of everything which are to become.⁶⁰ As present in, or identical to, human reason, the logoi spermatikoi stand for relative natural law, i.e. an ideal which in fact could be disobeyed, for such logoi or principles are only virtual and admit consequently of the possibility that they do not come to completion.

However, the Stoics in this way identified the divine Logos who works in all things with the universe. The Divine is present in nature, and through it He gives his law to all men. The being of God is the whole world.⁶¹ Contrary to the Stoics, the Neoplatonists separated God from nature, and the law of God from the law of nature. For Plotinus, the law of the gods is above that of nature.⁶² One must pass, claims Porphyry, from the law of nature to the law of God.⁶³ On the contrary, Athanasius, on one hand, criticizes the Stoics for they "draw out their God into all," and "rank God's Logos with each work in particular."⁶⁴ On the other hand, he sharply contradicts the Neoplatonic separation of God from nature and its laws. Although he contradicts the Stoic identification of God and nature, he asserts that the laws of nature witness to God their creator. Nevertheless, the interdependence of all parts of nature forbids us to think of one of them as the supreme God.⁶⁵

It is remarkable that "in the Hellenistic period, the expression "*law of nature*" was employed almost exclusively in the moral sense." Consequently, "the moral law of nature was regarded as governing everything in the universe." ⁶⁶ Similarly, the "logos" in man plays the same directive role which the divine "Logos" plays in the universe. Virtue is defined by the Stoics as life in accordance with nature, or life in accordance with reason. ⁶⁷ So, the natural law was, for them, a moral force emanated to man from reason and the law of the universe. ⁶⁸

It is remarkable also that the identification of what is natural with what is legal had influenced the Roman law. The jurists regarded positive justice and law as the result of natural law which issues from the Divine nature; and the validity of the laws is based upon the degree of containing the impress of this natural law. ⁶⁹ Probably the Stoic conception of the law of nature, and the fact that the Stoics belonged to the upper and ruling class, made it possible for them to influence the world. The Roman jurists were steeped in the ideas of the Stoics, which they tried to unite with positive law. ⁷⁰ Thus, the legal system, to a great extent, carried those principles into practice, driving the positive legal enactment back to the general divine law of nature. All ordinances of positive law were ultimately based on the idea of natural law. ⁷¹ The jurists, both classical and post-classical, share this tendency to identify nature with the law of the Roman State. ⁷²

The Fathers of the Church opted to side with prevailing culture. They reacted against moral decadence but in

agreement with the ancient philosophy.⁷³ Christian writers appropriated those elements of late antiquity which had an affinity with Christianity and a similar outlook on the world. The fusion of the ethics of Christianity with the religious element in Stoicism was so thorough that the Stoic idea of natural law was regarded as identical with the Christian moral law. This law of nature seemed to Christians to be part of the order of creation and integral part of the Christian moral law. It seemed to them to be a directly Christian doctrine.⁷⁴ Clement of Alexandria describes the law of nature as "given by God," and argues that Chrysippus' definition of natural law comes from the Old Testament.⁷⁵

Athanasius too shows the same concept of natural law. Nature possesses the law of its being, an essential element which God assigned. It is the wisdom which nature reveals: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork." (Ps. 19:1)⁷⁶ The whole universe reflects the law of nature created by God who, "by His own Logos, gave the universe the order it has, in order that since He is by nature invisible, men might be able to know Him at any rate by His own works."⁷⁷ To prove his idea, Athanasius quotes St. Paul who says, "His invisible things since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made;" (Rom 1:20) and, "God ... left not Himself without witness." (Acts 14:17)⁷⁸ "The creatures witness to their own framer, so as through creation we apprehend the true God."⁷⁹ Following St. Paul, Athanasius draws also upon the Stoic doctrine of moral law which is written in the hearts of all human beings as knowledge of goodness. He quotes, "That which may be

known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it unto them." (Rom. 1:19) ⁸⁰

The knowledge of God's law of nature, then, is available to everyone by God's wisdom which is "imaged in the world." ⁸¹ "The Son of Sirach says, 'He poured her out upon all His works; she is with all flesh according to His gift.'" (Ecclus. 1:9) ⁸² This wisdom is called "the right understanding, by which man at the beginning was rational and in the image of God." ⁸³ It is "God's impress of wisdom" in creation, by which "the world might recognize in it its own Creator." ⁸⁴ Athanasius comments, "This if men have within them, they will acknowledge the true Wisdom of God; and will know that they are made really after God's image." ⁸⁵

The Scripture is full of "a multitude of wise men" who followed the natural wisdom, for "a wise man feareth and departeth from evil;" (Prov. 14:16) and "through wisdom is a house built." (Prov. 24:1) It is the divinely implanted natural knowledge of religiously unilluminated heathen. "God has not only made us out of nothing, but He gave us freely ... a life in correspondence with Him." ⁸⁶ Therefore, those who refuse to "inquire in wisdom" for natural knowledge are "blind to the truth." ⁸⁷ "They hear indeed, but they do not understand; they see indeed, but they do not perceive; for their heart is waxen fat, and with their ears they hear heavily." (Is. 6:9) ⁸⁸ It is not fit to consider them "human beings;" for if they considered this natural knowledge and this intellectual part of their soul, they would not have plunged headlong into several kinds of moral corruption. ⁸⁹

They are to be blamed according to St. Paul who complains, "After that in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God." (I Cor. 1:21) ⁹⁰

Thus, the idea of natural law is understood by Athanasius as corresponding with God's law. Consequently, he introduces marriage as both a natural and lawful institution permitted by God. ⁹¹ He explicitly records, "Marriage, which is according to nature, is not contrary to the law." ⁹² Nature intends the race to continue, therefore it urges the human being to beget. Procreation reveals the natural order and harmony pervading the universe "among things mutually unlike and contrary;" so "male and female are not the same, while yet they unite in one, and the result is the generation from both of an animal like them." ⁹³

Although man too is ruled by natural law like animals, in virtue of his reason as rational he can see which actions will help him to attain the goal of nature. Hence, marriage is a stable union freely embraced by man and woman by a law of nature. For this end, the creation and the association of man and woman is designed. God who made "all things" without "exception" created the nature of man from the beginning as male and female and joined them through the bond of marriage. ⁹⁴ Athanasius affirms, "Marriage is in accord with nature." ⁹⁵ It is the natural order which God permitted when He said, "Increase and multiply and replenish the earth." (Gen. 1:28) ⁹⁶ Therefore, "he is blessed who, being freely yoked in his youth, naturally begets children." ⁹⁷ Nevertheless, marriage and the begetting of children, as a natural law, are bound upon the human race,

and not on each of its members. Consequently, any particular individual is free to marry or to abstain from marriage. He or she can choose "the more moderate and ordinary ... way of the world, namely marriage," or "vow that virginity which lies beyond the law." ⁹⁸

The religious aspect of marriage is based upon the natural law of marriage; and any failure to carry out what nature demands necessarily entail disobedience of God. When "the audacity of men ... leads away their members to adultery instead of lawful procreation", they are described as they "use nature licentiously"; and in this case, they are condemned as adulterers. ⁹⁹ Both polygamy and divorce are contrary to natural law, for God "from the beginning" joined one male to one female, and ordered them not to be put asunder. (Matt. 19:4,6) ¹⁰⁰

Similarly, moral corruption of paganism is considered against God as well as against nature. "Women, for example, used to ... consecrate to the gods the hire of their bodies,...while men, denying their nature, and no longer wishing to be males, put on the guise of women." ¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the common transgression of the law of nature among the pagans is that: "All live along with the basest, and vie with the worst among themselves, as Paul said, 'For their women changed the natural use into that which is against nature; and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another, men with men working unseemliness.'" (Rom. 1:26,27) ¹⁰² Homosexuality is described as "a crime against nature." ¹⁰³ Evidently, the saying of St. Paul (Rom. 1:26,27) and the

comment of Athanasius refer to a natural law of the ethics of marriage among people who, even though not instructed by God's law, are able to carry out its essential precepts, guided by their nature which is also created by God.¹⁰⁴

Now, natural law, if applied to marriage, probably links conjugal copulation to procreation. The ancient concept associated two people for the purpose of marriage in order to beget children. Following natural law, Judaism generally taught that offspring is the essential purpose of marriage.¹⁰⁵ Philo writes that the law of nature bids man to reproduce; hence, marriage should be for this purpose only.¹⁰⁶ For Josephus, the Law approves the natural union of husband and wife for the sake of progeny only. He mentions a branch of Essenes who, unlike the majority, feel obliged to marry for the continuance of the race. Nevertheless, as soon as a wife is pregnant, the husband abstains from further intimacy.¹⁰⁷ Besides, a social and secular factor favored marriage for population, namely to assure the recruitment of citizens for the city. The Roman Empire in the early Christian centuries was in danger of underpopulation, and deplored the declining birthrate.¹⁰⁸

The assumption that procreation is the only motive of marital relation had been taken over unexamined by some Christian Fathers. The decadence of the Graeco-Roman world undoubtedly influenced a certain fear of the sexual act without the purpose of progeny.¹⁰⁹ For centuries, the generally prevalent view was that a Christian was permitted to marry only for begetting children. In his *Apology for Christians*, 1:29, Justin Martyr defends his Christian

community who were accused of sexual immorality. He says, "Either we marry with the only one thought, to have children, or if we forego marriage, we keep ourselves continent at all times."¹¹⁰ Like Justin, Athenagoras asserts, in his *Supplication for the Christians*, 33, that the Christians marry only to produce children. Using the popular metaphor of agriculture, he adds that they avoid intercourse during the wife's pregnancy. "As the husbandman, throwing the seed into the ground, awaits the harvest not sowing more upon it, so the procreation of children is the measure of our indulgence in appetite."¹¹¹

In order to contrast purposeful procreation with Gnostic ideas of both forced continence and libertine sexuality, Clement of Alexandria and Origen held the same attitude. Constructing a law of marriage from Stoic elements, they placed their argument on the basis of natural law. Both of them were convinced of the Stoic ideal that conjugal relations should be approached only for the sake of posterity. Clement used the metaphor of agriculture, and Origen adopted the comparison with animals. The inner emotional side of sexuality is rejected as constituting concupiscence; the result of the Fall.¹¹²

According to Athanasius, marriage, as created by God in the very nature of man, is not only the means of increasing and replenishing the earth (Gen. 1:28), but the institution in itself is "honorable, and the bed is undefiled." (Heb. 13:4) "The twain shall become one flesh." (Matt. 19:5)¹¹³ The Great Pastor of Alexandria states, "Human nature, which experienced a rib removed to make woman, searches for

wholeness in seeking union with the opposite sex." ¹¹⁴ Thus, he refuses the kind of marriage where procreation took precedence over everything else, hence the partner is reduced to a mere tool. For him, the purpose of marriage is not using one another, not even for reproduction, but imitating Christ who loved the Church to "represent her holy and without blemish." (Eph. 5:27) ¹¹⁵ Such marriage transcends any merely natural marriage, and opens the way for the fullness of a fruitful love. ¹¹⁶

In fact, this transcendent concept of marriage is based on the Christian doctrine of sanctification which proclaims a new nature for man. ¹¹⁷ Consequently, the law of this new nature transcends and supports the natural law. As mentioned before, natural law for Athanasius is the impress of God in man as created in His image. It is a kind of wisdom given to man from the beginning as a "reflection of the Word;" "a portion even of the power of His (God's) own Word," by which man is rational. ¹¹⁸ After the Fall, even though this natural wisdom did not perish, it is not any more in its natural state. The likeness is now effaced and dimmed; thus, it needed to be renewed. ¹¹⁹ Natural law now can only become evident in the form of an order of law and compulsion which reacts against corruption and sin. ¹²⁰ Later on, this natural law which was innate in man was formulated and supported by the Mosaic law and the prophets. Knowing the weakness of men, God sent a law and prophets, so that even if men were not ready to know God by looking at nature, "they might have their instruction from those near at hand." ¹²¹ According to Athanasius, "neither was the law for the Jews alone, nor were the prophets sent for them only, but

... they were for all the world a holy school of the knowledge of God and the conduct of the soul." ¹²²

However, the Mosaic law was not able to sanctify man. Its ordinances "were fit only to purify the flesh; but now, through the grace of God, every man is thoroughly cleansed." ¹²³ The Christian has a new and sanctified nature which he assumes through baptism, as being a son of God. His body becomes "God's temple" where the Spirit of God dwells. (I Cor. 3:16) ¹²⁴ He may enjoy the competence of this new nature if he directs his life toward God, and presses on toward the goal unto the prize of His calling. (Phil. 3:14) ¹²⁵ Athanasius considers this new nature as a seed; and when it is sown by Christ, "the Sower of grace, and the Bestower of the Spirit," it brings forth new kinds of fruit; an honorable marriage and a virtue of continence. The Lord adorns the field of the Church, with both honorable marriage and consecrated virginity. ¹²⁶

The concept of man's nature is not isolated from his actual condition; so the married life corresponds with the new nature of the couple. Marriage under the new nature is more than human; the element of God's grace is added, and the institution is sanctified. Love and sexual desire within marriage are sanctified and undefiled. (Heb. 13:4) ¹²⁷ Now, the supernatural and divine grace complements the nature of the body; it does not destroy it, neither discard it.

Actually, such Christian concepts preached by Athanasius freed marriage from a narrow interpretation of natural law. No doubt, procreation is an important purpose

of marriage, for men "naturally beget children" and propagate the "image and likeness of God,"¹²⁸ but Athanasius' idea is widened to include love between husband and wife. Otherwise, man, like animals, must be allowed lawfully to have intercourse only at the suitable time of pregnancy. There is no place for love which cannot exist at all if conjugal relation is confined to a short time in the whole life. The institution in this case is made by the Stoics more rigorous than ever by requiring husband and wife to control their every gesture, and to demonstrate that any desire is subjected to the dictates of reason and to the law of nature.¹²⁹

In addition, while the Stoics held that the love of man for his wife is shameful, they speculated about the natural desire for beauty and love for boys, which they considered typical of love in general.¹³⁰ However, it is an expected result; for if the Stoics are led only by a natural sexual motive, they cannot escape promiscuity, justifying their conduct as according to nature. Contrarily, homosexuality, for Athanasius, is "a crime against nature," for such people are "using nature licentiously."

We conclude that Athanasius recognizes natural law which God created, and by His Biblical law He developed and supported; but owing to the Fall, it became a relative natural law.¹³¹ It needed the power of the grace manifested in the new nature of the Christian. The idea that marriage symbolizes the bond between Christ and the Church raises the institution to a status in which more than the purpose of lawful offspring of legitimate children is involved. The

grace of God sustains the nature of man and sanctifies the bed of matrimony. It not only makes marriage to be in accordance with natural law, but also raises it more and more to be appropriate to the new nature.

V.3 Ascetic Aspect

While Athanasius asserts the importance of the supernatural element to live a holy life, the Greeks, analogous to Jewish legalism, held that holiness resulted from asceticism as a methodical effort. Philosophical dualism underlay Greek asceticism, whether Stoic or Neoplatonic, and was further hardened by Gnostics and Manichees. The basic idea of this asceticism is the opposition between senses and the spirit, and the fight against the realm of matter and the body. The denial of the material world is expressed either by the severest abstention or by a libertine ignoring of material conditions altogether.

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However, the ascetic attitude of abstention prevailed in the Church, and renunciation of marriage was highly regarded. It was easy to scorn marriage and praise celibacy. Christian "renouncers" were common in the towns and villages of Egypt. Many of them held that committed Christianity meant continence.¹³³ A significant attitude of antipathy to sexuality interpreted sexual abstention as the central and indispensable instrument of the quest for salvation. It is remarkable that although Clement of Alexandria regards the married man as superior to the single, the reason is that the former has the opportunity to withstand "every temptation which assails him through children and wife."¹³⁴ Marital relation is, for him, a temptation that must be withstood; and the true Christian does not feel any sexual desire at all.¹³⁵

As for Origen, his writings betray an embarrassment about sexual activity as involving some intrinsic evil. His ascetic turn of mind makes "idolatrous enjoyment" implicit in the sexual instinct.¹³⁶ The ideal of marriage, for him, is achieved if the love of the spouses imitates that of Christ and His Church and eschews all bodily passion; an attitude of spiritualization of marriage.¹³⁷ Accordingly, virginity is highly estimated in itself. It is virginity, not marriage, that corresponds with the very nature of the body.¹³⁸

Actually, Origen's type of asceticism corresponds with his viewpoint of the body as evil, and to its role as a prison of the soul for its punishment and purification.¹³⁹ The body has value in its punishing the soul to return to God, but in itself, it is of little value. Man is put here in this material world as in "a place to educate him to return to his master." The pre-existent soul could realize again its kinship with God through contemplation.¹⁴⁰ He holds also that sexuality and marriage are the result of the Fall of Adam and Eve; so that, had this sin not been committed, there would be no need for sexuality, and hence for marriage. Original sin, for him, is transmitted by procreation, being linked to the sexual relation of the parents with all the passion which accompanies it.¹⁴¹ Such ideas influenced the whole Church for centuries, and spread widely between monastic communities to the extent that Origen is considered as a forerunner of monasticism.¹⁴² While the Bishops of Alexandria after him, like Peter and Alexander, represent a more tempered Origenism, the more marked one remained in the non-Episcopal heads of the Alexandrian School, such as Didymus the Blind.¹⁴³ Athanasius, probably, received his

first training from Origenist sources, but eventually diverged from Origen.¹⁴⁴

However, Athanasius was the first Alexandrian Father of the Church who was not at home in the academic atmosphere of Christian philosophy. His greatest merit remains his defense of traditional Christianity against the danger of Hellenization.¹⁴⁵ In fact, he studied "literature and philosophy", says Gregory Nazianzus, one of his contemporaries, "so that he might not be utterly unskilled in such subjects;"¹⁴⁶ but philosophy provides him with a vehicle of expression rather than a point of departure. He uses Greek language and some Greek philosophical concepts to communicate with the educated people in Alexandria, the cosmopolitan city. If he makes use of philosophy, he does it in order to unfold and clarify the doctrine of the Church. Holding that divine revelation guides the use of philosophy, he borrows forms and concepts of Greek thought, but fills them with a content taken from the Scriptures.¹⁴⁷ For example, if he qualifies evil as non-being, using the style and expressions of Platonism, he refuses the view of regarding matter as the principle of evil.¹⁴⁸

Athanasius' particular attitude of asceticism, then, is based on a sanctified view of matter and the body. Reacting against the philosophical viewpoint of his time, he upholds the value of material creation. Erroneous views of creation are rejected. He records, "Many have taken different views, and each man has laid down the law just as he pleased." The Epicureans, for example, "say that all things have come into being of themselves, and in a chance fashion." Thus, they

claim that "universal providence does not exist", and deny "the Maker and Orderer of all." The Platonists "argue that God has made the world out of matter previously existing"; not understanding that "in that case, God could not be called Maker and Artificer if He owes His ability to make to some other source."¹⁴⁹

Against Gnostic ideas, Athanasius says that other sects "arbitrarily imagine another god besides the true One, ... and that he is the unmade producer of evil and the head of wickedness, who is also artificer of creation."¹⁵⁰ Conversely, the Bible testifies that there is one God "through whom all things were made." Therefore, "God persuades us and says, He spake and they were made. 'He commanded and they were created'." (Ps. 148:5)¹⁵¹ Athanasius then asserts, "Neither would the angels be able to frame, since they too are creatures, though Valentinus and Marcion and Basilides think so; nor will the sun, as being a creature, ever make what is not,... but God is He who fashions man in the womb."¹⁵² The Alexandrian Pastor refutes clearly the ascetic idea based on dualism, the idea which degrades the body as created by an evil demiurge. Marriage, for him, belongs to the Divine order of creation. Probably for this reason, he proves, in his 39th Paschal Letter of 367, the authenticity of the books of the Old Testament declaring them as canonical, in order to prove that there is no other creator "distinct from the Father of Christ."¹⁵³

Although Stoic and Neoplatonic asceticism should be distinguished from Gnostic and Manichaeic dualism,¹⁵⁴ it was rather a difference of motives and methods. The

practical issue in all cases was the same: a flight or escape from the body. The soul only could be divinized; and in order to achieve that, she had to distance herself from the body.¹⁵⁵ Stoic asceticism purposed to extirpate emotions as erroneous and passions as evil;¹⁵⁶ while Neoplatonism denied the possibility of God's incarnation. The real difference between Athanasius and the Neoplatonists is not so much over the union of the Word of God with any creation, which they were prepared to allow, as over His union with a human body. The difference goes back to the doctrine of creation. In contrast to the viewpoint of God's essential distinctness from the material universe, Athanasius defends its close relation to God as its Creator and Supporter.¹⁵⁷

Along with honoring matter and the body, Athanasius recognizes the value of sexual activity. As mentioned before, it is God Himself who, through conjugal relation, fashions man in the womb.¹⁵⁸ Nevertheless, asceticism is required of the married as of the unmarried. Indissoluble monogamy is one of the limitations imposed upon marital relation. All kinds of deviation are abhorred. Adultery is the action of "disreputable men" whom God's punishment shall await; and homosexuality is "a crime against nature."¹⁵⁹ Both sins originated and prevailed under idolatry, "as the wisdom of God testified beforehand when it says, 'The devising of idols was the beginning of fornication'." (Wisd. 14:12)¹⁶⁰ Pre-marital sexuality too is forbidden. Assaulting the Greek custom, the Alexandrian Pastor writes, "No husband-to-be could marry a woman without prior sexual relation, so that he cannot deny the offspring to be his, if she is found to be carrying a child."¹⁶¹

Marriage, in addition, does not mean that the spouses allow themselves to be in danger of sensuality and sexuality. "When Paul said 'Let those who have a wife be like those who had none', (I Cor. 7:29) he meant that they should not use marriage without interruption, but should desist at certain times for prayer; never to tear apart the bond."¹⁶² They have to "persuade each other" for temporary abstention; that is "to give themselves to prayer."¹⁶³ The purpose of such asceticism is perseverance in virtue.

At the same time, virginity as an ascetic attitude is defended against the Jewish viewpoint of considering virginity as diminishing the likeness of God.¹⁶⁴ Those who live in virginity practice asceticism by extenuating all natural bonds for the sake of God's love, and as a fruit of the seed of His word.¹⁶⁵ When they choose virginity, even though rugged and hard, they actually sacrifice marriage which is blessed and recommended.¹⁶⁶ Renunciation of marriage is founded upon love of the Lord as a bridegroom. It is a gift of divine grace and a great wonder of Christ.¹⁶⁷

The kind of asceticism rejected by Athanasius is that which is based on contempt and enmity toward the world without attending to man's perfection. It is a matter of rebellion against the Creator "by whom all things were made." (John 1:3)¹⁶⁸ Probably, this is why Athanasius endeavored carefully to explain away any contact or dealing of St. Antony with the Manichees.¹⁶⁹ Against their ascetic attitude to food, he writes that they, to support their idea, "pervert even a saying in the Gospels, alleging that 'not that which goeth in defileth a man, but what which goeth out'."

(Matt. 15:11) He alludes to them saying, "Certain persons, like these of today, were in doubt of meats." ¹⁷⁰ He follows, "The Lord Himself, to dispel their ignorance, or it may be to unveil their deceitfulness, lays down that, not what goes in defiles the man, but what goes out ... namely from the heart," which are "profane thoughts and other sins." Then, he cites the testimony of St. Paul, "But meat shall not bring us before God." (I Cor. 8:8) ¹⁷¹ Indeed, Athanasius teaches the importance of fasting; ¹⁷² but the motive is different. When the Christian fasts, he sacrifices food, which is good, for the sake of God's love. Similarly, when he abstains from marriage, he sacrifices what is blessed and established by God who "made everything pure." ¹⁷³

Asceticism, for the Alexandrian Prelate, serves the cause of sanctification, and has a relation to virtue. It is not a victory of the soul over the body, for both of them may be involved in sin. It is to be noticed that the iniquities of the body are called also "a vice and sin of the soul." ¹⁷⁴ That is why St. Paul exhorts, "Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (II Cor. 7:1) ¹⁷⁵ The object of asceticism is to subdue one's own will, and to allow the grace of God to take over the self. ¹⁷⁶ Thus, it is not an escape from the world but a positive achievement of sanctification within this world. By an openness of the whole person towards the operation of "the grace of the Savior," the result of such asceticism is: "To the pure all things are pure, but both the conscience and all that belongs to the unclean are defiled." (cf. Tit. 1:15) ¹⁷⁷

Furthermore, Athanasius deliberately advocated an ascetic ideal that was very much in line with the general feeling of the Egyptian Church. For him, in order that the bishop may gain the authority to effectively carry out his pastoral office, he needed to be known as an ascetic. To defend his election against the Arians who "find fault" with his appointment, he reports his acclamation by the people as "pious, Christian, an ascetic; a genuine Bishop."¹⁷⁸ When some monks saw the Episcopal office as an occasion of sin to be avoided, he was infuriated at such an attitude. He wrote to Dracontius that it is appropriate for a monk to be a bishop, meeting the needs of his people boldly. To convince him, he records the ascetic rigor of some bishops who kept their asceticism alongside their ministry.¹⁷⁹

In fact, Athanasius encouraged Christian asceticism powerfully. He associated himself with the ascetic movement, putting virginity under his auspices and containing monasticism within the boarder of the Church.¹⁸⁰ It is not without meaning that he writes that the virgins suffered with him for the orthodox faith, and were thrown into prison and tortured by the Arians.¹⁸¹ He purposefully showed Antony rejoicing as seeing his sister "grown old in virginity, and that she herself also was the leader of other virgins."¹⁸² Athanasius endeavored to absorb monasticism as a new movement from which the Church and her officials could benefit.¹⁸³ He asserts that he was Antony's attendant for a long time, "and poured water on his hands." (cf. II Kings 3:11)¹⁸⁴ Thus, he depicts Antony as the new Elijah, and himself as Elisha who inherits the cloak of his master.¹⁸⁵

Antony's asceticism is positively introduced by Athanasius as a spiritual martyrdom for God's sake. Antony grieved that he did not suffer martyrdom in Alexandria. Returning to his cell and practicing a severer asceticism, "he was there daily a martyr of his conscience and contending in the conflicts of faith."¹⁸⁶ According to Athanasius, "the proof of a martyr lies not only in refusing to burn incense to idols, but suffering and sacrifice are also an illustrious testimony of a good conscience."¹⁸⁷ Antony, however, was not isolated from society. The *Vita* is full of information which proves his willingness to serve the people. "Some came only for the sake of seeing him, others through sickness."¹⁸⁸ "He was able to be of such use to all ... and it was as if a physician had been given by God to Egypt."¹⁸⁹ He used to work hard, "weaving baskets, which he gave to those who came, in return for what they brought him."¹⁹⁰ Antony had no enmity to the people or to the Church but to heresies. In the meantime, he didn't hesitate to descend from the mountain to refute Arianism.¹⁹¹

Although the real attitude of monasticism is renunciation of the world, Athanasius does not deny its responsibility to the human society. Even though the monks "hide themselves and are desirous of withdrawing from the world, [the Lord] makes them illustrious and well known everywhere on account of their virtue and the help they render others."¹⁹² Evidently, the monastic movement was not limited to the poor peasantry. Its main leaders usually came from the notables of towns and villages.¹⁹³ It is known that while the Nile valley was a zone of food against the famine which threatened the population of that time, the desert was a deprived zone.¹⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Athanasius

admires the monastic congregation saying, "Their cells were in the mountains, like tabernacles, filled with holy bands of men who sang psalms, loved reading ... and labored in almsgiving." He adds, "There was neither the evil-doer, nor the injured, nor the reproaches of tax-gatherer." ¹⁹⁵

Thus, monastic asceticism is presented by Athanasius as a substitute of martyrdom and expression of love of God. It is a reaction to the laxity of the Church after the end of persecution; a sort of protesting the worldliness of the Church from which men turned away to live the Christian life in the desert. The idea of holding oneself aloof from the dangers and complications of the world which secularized the Church developed easily into asceticism. ¹⁹⁶

Finally, Athanasius proclaimed a kind of other-worldly asceticism when he intended to insure salvation in heaven. Quoting Mark 7:25, "In the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels," he explains that this heavenly asceticism corresponds with the new heavenly nature. He writes, "In Christ Jesus it shall be a new creation', (Gal. 6:18) and 'neither male nor female, but all and in all Christ'." (Gal. 3:28) Then he exclaims, "Where Christ is, what fear, what danger can still happen?" ¹⁹⁷ The power of this condition is man's kinship with the Lord's human body. "The Word being clothed in the flesh ..., every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunched out from it, and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away." ¹⁹⁸ This is the final goal of salvation: "For this end was He manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil; (I John 3:8) and these being destroyed from the

flesh, we all were thus liberated by the kinship of the flesh, and for the future were joined to the Word." ¹⁹⁹ In heaven, there will be no fear of sin:

Being joined to God, no longer do we abide upon earth; but, as He Himself has said, where He is, there shall we be also; and henceforward we shall fear no longer the serpent, for he was brought to nought when he was assailed by the Savior in the flesh, and heard Him say, 'Get thee behind Me, Satan', (Matt. 4:10) and thus he is cast out of paradise into the eternal fire. ²⁰⁰

It is then a divine grace of abstention and a spiritual kind of asceticism for the Kingdom of heaven.

We conclude that asceticism in Athanasius is not based on hatred of the body and the world but on the love of God and the Church. While ascetic attitudes which became an end in themselves prevailed both inside and outside the church, the main purpose of his asceticism is communion with God and growth in the life of sanctification. Marriage is regarded by Athanasius, the ascetic Bishop, as completely justified and belonging to the Divine order of creation. At the same time, asceticism is proclaimed as available to the married and unmarried alike.

V.4 SOCIO-ANTHROPOLOGICAL ASPECT

Athanasius' concept of marriage and asceticism may shed some light upon his socio-anthropological attitude. His viewpoint of the material human body reflects his anthropological idea of the human being. Also his doctrine of the sanctity of marriage on one hand, and the importance of asceticism on the other, uncovers his own opinion of the value of woman, as well as his concept of the elite. These three points will be discussed here:

- a. the value of the human being,
- b. the value of woman, and
- c. the concept of the elite.

The Value of the Human Being

As mentioned before, humankind was created in the image of God, even though consisting of a spiritual soul and a material body. Each human being is rational, and so is able to remain living the true life in communion with all saints. The body, even after the Fall, is not naturally evil, but temptation preys upon the natural weakness of the body and deviates man's free will.²⁰¹ In Athanasius' anthropology, the whole being of man made of both the soul and the body can do evil; it is not that the soul wants good and the body evil. The nature of sin lies in the alienation of the whole person

from God; and the capacity for defilement is on the part of the soul as well as of the body.²⁰²

Dualism, then, is absent from Athanasius' anthropology, for he locates sin throughout the whole human being; a willing soul as well as an acting body. Likewise, the grace of sanctification is posited for the full person. The body, not only the soul, was of such significance that it was not inappropriate for the Lord to assume a human body.²⁰³ This material and mortal body was offered on the Cross by Christ to the Father who accepted it for the benefit of all mankind. Christ's death in the flesh has a spiritual influence for sanctification to the extent that men and women rush willingly to death due to their devotion to Christ. Thus, the body of the individual believer is considered as a sacrifice acceptable in Christ.²⁰⁴

Consequently, the Gnostic concept of Christ's body is refuted. Christ was not regarded by the Gnostics as a historical man of flesh and blood, but as a semimythical heavenly being.²⁰⁵ The Alexandrian Prelate refused any docetic idea.²⁰⁶ "Docetism," says Alvyn Pettersen, "had Athanasius envisaged it here, would have involved not only a withdrawal from the world but also a removal from history."²⁰⁷ The tangible and passible body of the Logos is central to the Athanasian doctrine of sanctification. The Logos made flesh, who has manifested God in history, recreates humanity and human history.²⁰⁸ Athanasius writes, "Whatever is written concerning our Savior in His human nature ought to be considered as applying to the whole race of mankind, because He took our body, and exhibited in Himself human

infirmity." ²⁰⁹ The presence of the Creator in a real humanity is important to "recreate" the universe and "recall" man to his first dignity. ²¹⁰ Humanity is "greatly honored" by God's incarnation, as when a great king has entered some great city and dwelt in it. ²¹¹ This is the climax of value of the human being.

In addition, Athanasius' anthropology differs from that of his Gnostic contemporaries in another issue. Their anthropology was centered upon a sort of flight from individuality. They understood God and the world as strangers, for the world was, for them, the result of either an accident or malevolence of some heavenly powers. Accordingly, the historical and temporal order of the material world is not within the purpose of God. The Gnostic impetus of religious life was a desire to escape from the temporal and material. The pattern of such escape is the same for all, for there is no significant part to be played particularly by the individual. The Gnostics recognized no sense of human individual experience as the sphere of God's work. For them, the only authentic thing in the life of the individual was entirely free from the material and the historical. ²¹²

On the contrary, Athanasius accepts the materiality of the human state. The defense of his flight proves his belief that the bodily life is a gift of God who joined both soul and body, and "what God has joined let not man put asunder." (Matt. 19:6) ²¹³ Besides, he asserts the importance of individual experience, both moral and physical, for man's benefit. The tribulations of this world are seen as a factor which leads the whole life of man to sanctification. He

teaches, "Through many tribulations, labors and sorrows, the saint enters into the kingdom of heaven". It is the transformation of, not transformation from, matter which is confirmed. "The creation itself groaneth together and travaileth together." (Rom. 8:22) ²¹⁴ "But the creation itself, of which the Apostle speaks, 'waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, shall be delivered' one time 'from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God'." (Rom 8:19,21) ²¹⁵ This liberation is achieved through the incarnate life of the Logos: "The Son of God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, has become man for our sake and destroyed death and delivered our race from the bondage of corruption." ²¹⁶ The body, assumed by the Logos and sanctified by Him, now regains its social responsibility; for the bodies of the Christians who are members of Christ's body become the instruments for fulfilling God's commandments through the individual's worship and service. ²¹⁷ The Alexandrian Pastor concludes his first Paschal Letter writing, "Let us remember the poor and not forget kindness to strangers; above all, let us love God with all our soul ..., and our neighbor as ourselves." ²¹⁸

The historical role and the anthropological value of the individual have also an eschatological dimension. The Christian is exhorted to live in the light of the Lord's second coming and final judgment, waiting for the promise of the resurrection. ²¹⁹ While the Gnostics were eager to see the human being as nothing but the soul, Athanasius asserts the re-integration of the soul with a renewed body, and then the exaltation of both as the whole human being. ²²⁰ In the last day, each individual "may receive according to what he has done in the body, whether good or evil." (II Cor. 5:10) ²²¹

The deeds performed "in the body" are the criteria of the final judgment for every human being.

Athanasius' anthropology is also different from the Arians'. Man, according to Arianism, is not able to have fellowship and unity with God, nor to be adopted by Him; and thus he loses his utmost value. The reason is that the common ground of communion between God and man, which is Christ's body, is suspect, as the Arians are accused of holding a docetic idea of the incarnation in a human flesh.²²² In addition, man under Arianism loses the possibility of God's adoption through baptism. Athanasius writes, "God not only created them to be men, but called them to be sons, as having begotten them." He adds, "They could not become sons, being by nature creatures, otherwise than by receiving the Spirit of the natural and true Son." Then he concludes, "The Word became flesh, that He might make man capable of receiving Godhead."²²³ When the Arians deny the divinity of Christ, supposing the Lord Jesus "not the Logos coming in the flesh, but a mere man," "they hazard the fullness of the mystery, I mean baptism." "The Arians do not baptize into Father and Son, but into Creator and creature." Comparing the Christian baptism to the Arians', the Saint of Alexandria exclaims, "If the consecration is given to us into the name of Father and Son, and they do not confess a true Father, because they deny what is from Him and like His Essence, ... is not the rite administered by them altogether empty and unprofitable?"²²⁴ Athanasius envisages baptism as no mere invitation or following of Christ, as the Arians seem to have done, but rather as an acceptance of sonship, and an incorporation in Christ as living members of the ecclesiastical body of Christ.

Furthermore, mankind, for the Arians, were not created by God Himself but by an inferior God. They say:

God willing to create originate nature, when He saw that it could not endure the untempered hand of the Father, and to be created by Him, makes and creates first and alone one only, and calls Him Son and Word, that, through Him as a medium all things might thereupon be brought to be. ²²⁵

They add, "Because originate nature could not endure to be God's own handwork, there arose need of a mediator." ²²⁶ To refute them, Athanasius writes that God did not disdain to create matter, "for in Him there is no pride." ²²⁷ God condescended to creation that it might be possible for them to come into being. ²²⁸ Then he comes to the conclusion that the Arians "will incur the disgrace of rivalling and repeating what Valentinus held, and Carpocrates and those other heretics, of whom the former said that angels are framers of the world." ²²⁹ They also rival "the Manichees who make to themselves another God." ²³⁰ Athanasius considers that those who deny that God created man "introduce a creation alien to the Father." He writes that "these sectaries imagine to themselves a different artificer of all things, other than the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," who made man "male and female," and created marriage, ordering that "the two will become one flesh." ²³¹

Finally, Athanasius' approach is different from that of Neoplatonism which depreciates the material life of the human beings, and thus bring about an increasing withdrawal from the world and from others. Although Plotinus believes in the goodness of the material world, yet he thinks that the true life is not, and cannot, finally be found in this life in the fellowship and service of other like-minded people.²³² In contrast to this concept of community, the ultimate value of Christian community, for Athanasius, is in the incorporation of the believers into Christ's one body, the Church. Both Jews and Greeks are equally called to this body whose members vie to help one another.²³³

The value of the human being, then, is evidently great in Athanasius' mind. Mankind is created by God's hand and in His own image; and human nature is considered worthy to be assumed by God's Logos. Docetic ideas are refused; and the first honor of human beings is restored when the Creator Logos, in whose image the human race was created, came in a real humanity to restore those who are in His image.²³⁴ Individual experience and responsibility are asserted. The final judgment is according to man's deeds performed in the body; and the exaltation of the world to come is for the whole man. Believing in the divinity of the Incarnate Logos means that man is able to endure God's dwelling, and to be adopted by Him. It is God Himself, and not a mediator, who created man and established marriage. While the Roman law differentiates between the free citizen and the slave, Athanasius proclaims with St. Paul, "There is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; but all and in all." Christ (Gal. 3:28)²³⁵ At Athanasius' time, women endured "a heavy burden of suppression."²³⁶

The Value of Woman

With the exception of the upper social classes where women had "relative independence,"²³⁷ she was considered as an inferior being without rights. She was enslaved by man as if she were an evil force, a permanent threat to his freedom. A rhetorical commonplace was the "three reasons for gratitude", variously attributed to Thales or Plato, "that I was born a human being and not a beast, next, a man and not a woman, thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian". The pattern found its way into the traditions of Rabbinic piety in which the Jewish male thanks God for having been born male, and not female, free and not slave, and Jew rather than gentile²³⁸.

Jewish and pagan polygamy and dissolubility of marriage made it easy to repudiate women. Although Judaism honored them as "necessary for the existence of Israel," it kept them "from intruding on the serious business of male wisdom." Just as the Stoics discussed the question whether women ought to philosophize, the Rabbis disagreed that women should be instructed in the Torah to the extent that they preferred the words of the Torah to be burnt than to be delivered to women.²³⁹ However, Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, may reflect both Jewish and Greek attitude. He regards marriage as natural and necessary, but, contrary to matriarchal old Egyptian society where women attained unusual independence in economic, legal, and even political affairs, he considers that the only legitimate purpose of marriage is procreation, and that the proper relation of a wife to her husband is to serve him as a slave.²⁴⁰

In Roman law, as in Hebrew legislation, there was no real equality of the spouses. For example, in case of adultery, a husband who allowed himself extramarital relations with an unmarried girl was not regarded as an adulterer, but the married women who did the same was punished as an adulteress. In the old civic code, the wife was nothing but an accessory to the work of man and to produce children; and in the new code, the wife was a friend and companion but still inferior. It was her duty to recognize her natural inferiority and obey her husband who would respect her as his devoted subordinate. Woman was so much an object that noblemen can pass her back and forth ²⁴¹. Nevertheless, while the Roman wife could take the initiative to end the marriage, the Jewish wife could not.

Gnostic and Manichaeian views of woman were dominant at Athanasius' time. Agreeing with the ancient philosophy, the existence of woman as a person was denied. She was considered a defective male, a less perfect being. ²⁴² Some Gnostics regarded woman as a "work of Satan," hence "those who consort in marriage fulfill the work of Satan;" ²⁴³ while, according to the Manichaeian myth of creation, Adam was able to enter the Kingdom of Light but Eve went to Hell. ²⁴⁴ For Valentinus, the female stood for all that was aimless and lacking of shape and direction. ²⁴⁵ *The Dialogue of the Savior* records, "Judas said: when we pray, how should we pray? The Lord said: Pray in the place where there is no woman;" ²⁴⁶ and the *Gospel of Thomas* cites, "Simon Peter said to them: Let Mary leave us, for the women are not worthy of life. Jesus said: I myself shall lead her and make her male." ²⁴⁷ At any rate, woman was inferior, and she would be saved only if she became a man. ²⁴⁸

Against this tendency towards woman, the two Alexandrian teachers wrote. Clement argued that the wives of the Apostles followed them, only "as sisters, that they might be their fellow-ministers in dealing with housewives."²⁴⁹ The story that St. Peter's wife was martyred is told only by Clement.²⁵⁰ Both Clement and Origen wrote about the ministry of "widows" and "women deacons" as instituted by the Apostles;²⁵¹ but although Clement says that woman is equal to man in everything and capable of attaining the same degree of perfection, he adds that unless he has become effeminate, man is always better in everything than woman. He writes, "For woman even to reflect on her nature results in opprobrium."²⁵² This attitude spread into certain monastic circles where one has the impression that the monk who wants to save himself must, above all, save himself from women. There is an echo of Gnosticism in this, where "redemption" means "deliverance from sex," and where woman is reduced to the mere sexual.²⁵³

In fact, Athanasius proclaimed strongly the concept of equivalence which takes its basis from the Bible story of creation: "From the beginning, He who created them made them male and female." (Matt. 19:4) Both men and women possess equally the image of God as human persons (anqrwpoi) and both are given "also a share in the power of His Word."²⁵⁴ This understanding of shared humanity in God's image has been restored in Christ. Athanasius quotes Galatians 3:28, where all humanity is seen as one, "neither male nor female but all and in all Christ."²⁵⁵

It is true that the Stoics argued that sexual inequality is contrary to the law of nature, for the "logos" of each person is the "logos" of every one; so, in their common possession of reason, all human beings by nature are equal.²⁵⁶ E. Troeltsch writes that the idea of equality has been drawn by the church from the Stoics.²⁵⁷ This proposal is not true for Athanasius who contradicts the basic idea upon which the Stoics built up their principle of equality. He condemns their concept of the common "logos" when he writes that they, like the Arians, "draw out their God into all things."²⁵⁸ The basis of equality in Athanasius is different. All human beings are equal as being created out of nothing by the One God who also adopted them through baptism as His equal children. In addition, the Stoic concept of equality resulted in arguing that men and women should wear the same kind of clothing, an idea rejected by Athanasius. For him, when men put on the guise of women, they are "denying their nature and no longer wishing to be males."²⁵⁹ It is remarkable that Zeno adheres to the Platonic doctrine of the community of wives, in spite of its obvious incompatibility with their sexual egalitarianism.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, the Stoics' view of marriage only for the purpose of procreation does not square with their idea of equality of sexes.

Woman is valued by Athanasius as a partner in the "honorable marriage,"²⁶¹ and not as a means of procreation. Neither as a mere sexual object is woman looked upon by him, for "whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery;" (Matt. 5:28)²⁶² and "if one uses nature [of the relation of sexes] licentiously, the punishment of which the Apostle writes (Heb. 13:4) shall await whoremongers and adulterers."²⁶³ Nor even the

legitimate marriage is a license for sexuality. Both husband and wife should encourage each other for temporary abstinence.²⁶⁴

"The spiritual meditations of those who are whole" are, for Athanasius, the way to achieve such a standard.²⁶⁵ Within the new life in Christ, man and woman have a new identity capable to hold this attitude, for the equivalence of all mankind in God's image had been restored by Christ. The wonderful fruit of this new life is shared by both sexes. "Christian boys and young girls despise this present life and prepare themselves for dying [as martyrs]."²⁶⁶ To prove this, the Bishop of Alexandria calls all people "to come up and see the demonstration of virtue in the virgins of Christ, and the youths who live a pure life in chastity, and the belief in immortality in such a great company of martyrs."²⁶⁷

Actually, if Athanasius encouraged monks, he supported virgins much more. He wrote to them more than he did to the monks.²⁶⁸ Several times he mentions special houses inhabited by virgins, probably established by him.²⁶⁹ St. Mary the Virgin is introduced as an example for all virgins. The incarnation is accomplished in the feminine being of the Virgin who gave her body to God's Logos. Against those who "say that the body is not from Mary, but is coessential with the Logos," he defends the view that "Mary is truly presupposed, in order that He may take it [the body like ours] from her, and offer it for us as His own." He comments, "Gabriel is sent to her, not simply to a virgin, but `to a virgin betrothed to a man' (Luke 1:27) in order that by means of the betrothed woman he might show that Mary was

really a human being." ²⁷⁰ Christ's incarnation, then, took place through a female: "He has been born of woman;" from Mary "our sister." ²⁷¹ If she is a virgin as well, that is, as mentioned before, the way in which Christ makes his incarnation miraculous.

Widows too enjoyed Athanasius' concern. In his *Letter to the Church of Alexandria*, around 343-4 A.D., he advises the clergy, "Pray for us, bearing in mind the necessities of the widows, especially since the enemies of truth have taken away what belongs to them." ²⁷² The allusion here is to the Arian persecution where both virgins and monks suffered. ²⁷³ In an expressive way, Athanasius describes what happened to the virgins in particular. "They scourged with stripes the holy persons of the virgins, tore off their veils and exposed their heads." ²⁷⁴ He points out that virgins participated in his fight against the Arians as they "condemned their impiety, and professed the truth." ²⁷⁵

It is noticed by modern authors that "in the state of virginity, the unmarried woman has the right of personal self-determination over her body and life;" ²⁷⁶ and "the state of virginity and the establishment of convents for women gave a value and a position to the unmarried woman which gave women an influence and scope in spiritual matters." ²⁷⁷ These comments correspond with Athanasius' attitude. When he describes the virgin as Christ's bride, he actually acknowledges woman's right to give her body to the divine Bridegroom; and when he patronizes virginity, he recognizes woman's part in his ministry as well as his fight against Arianism. Athanasius records the effort of Basilina, Julian's

mother, against Eustathius the Arian, writing that she "was the most active person in the proceedings against him." On the other side, he mentions that Eusebius of Nicomedia and his fellows "had an introduction to the Emperor from the women."²⁷⁸ Women are considered as in influential capacity, whether with him or against him.

Now, we come to discuss two problems. Firstly, Eve, the first wife, is accused of having perpetrated the most tragic disobedience, luring her husband into disobeying God. (Gen. 3:6)²⁷⁹ In his *Sexual Relation in Christian Thought*, D.S. Bailey comments on Athanasius' *Con. Ar.*, II.69, writing, "The female sex ... is to be suspected and avoided as a subtle and dangerous temptress, always inclined to beguile man and to inflame him with evil passions."²⁸⁰ It seems that Bailey missed the main concept of Athanasius. The quotation itself is as follows:

Being joined to God, ... we shall fear no longer the serpent, for he was brought to nought when he was assailed by the Savior in the flesh (Matt. 4:10) ... Nor shall we have to watch against woman beguiling us, for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels (Mark 12:25); and in Christ Jesus it shall be 'a new creation'. (Gal. 6:15)

The Alexandrian Prelate here advises his people not to fear that what took place in Eden may happen once more in the Life to come. In Eden, the serpent deceived Eve, and Eve in turn persuaded her husband to eat; and if woman is blamed for beguiling man, man is also blamed for he did not guard against persuasion. In several places Eve is shown as a deceived victim. Athanasius records that "the serpent seduced the woman;" and "the enemy deceived Eve;"²⁸¹ more clearly, "Scripture ... relates his wicked artifices against Eve."²⁸² When we put into consideration that Arius is likened by Athanasius to the serpent and the innocent people is likened to the deceived woman, we find out that Athanasius defends Eve trying to give her an excuse as innocent, but deceived by the serpent. He emphasizes that in order to deceive Eve, Satan "did not speak his own but adopted the words of God perverting their meaning."²⁸³ Similarly, "he suggested evil to the wife of Job, persuading her to feign affection for her husband, while he taught her to blaspheme God."²⁸⁴ Women, however, are enabled in Christ to conquer the devil: "So weak has he become, that women who were formerly deceived by him, now mock at him as dead and paralyzed."²⁸⁵ It is remarkable that Athanasius records that it is Adam, not only Eve, who was deceived by Satan. He writes, "He deceived the first man Adam, thinking that through him he should have all men subject unto him."²⁸⁶ Teaching his people not to blame others, he exclaims, "How did it benefit Adam to say, 'The woman beguiled me?!'" (Gen. 3:12)²⁸⁷

The second problem is that Athanasius writes that pagans "extended the epithet of divine to women; for they worship and pay divine honors even to women, whom it is

not safe to receive in councils on public affairs." ²⁸⁸ Thus, Athanasius is understood as devaluing woman. ²⁸⁹ In fact, the Bishop of Alexandria refutes pagan idolatry, using a contemporary social and political tradition which did not allow woman to be a member in political councils and deal with public affairs. Had Athanasius lived in our time, he would not have said that, for such a position has been changed. However, if we consider what Athanasius holds of the value of woman as mentioned before, we will recognize that this saying does not represent his view of woman, but rather reflects a common social and political concept of his time.

Athanasius, then, valued woman as equal to man in creation, salvation, and adoption of baptism. She is honored in her self as a co-partner, and not as a body or merely as a means of procreation. Her important role in the Church and society is recognized.

The Concept of the Elite

Although the unity of mankind is unquestioned, humanity is diverse, not only racially and culturally but also in its relation to ideas; a minority of humans is idealist and the majority is materialist. This division is translated socially and religiously into elite-mass dichotomy.²⁹⁰

In Athanasius' time, Christianity was less and less a proposition for an elite. Massively, the population of the Roman Empire was flocking to it, especially after the coalition of the Church and the State. Nevertheless, the Encratites, Gnostics, Manichees and Montanists, wanted Christianity to be idealist and elitist, in reaction to laxity and compromise which the life of ordinary Christians involved. Believing that they are distinct from the rest of the world, the Encratic sects claimed that they alone were the saved; they alone had within themselves the divine spark.²⁹¹

The Gnostic society was divided into "pneumatics" or "perfect ones" and the "psychics." The pneumatics, those who were to be redeemed, radiated a vast serenity in which sexual desire had been swallowed up, as distinct from the psychics who lived trapped in the lower life of the soul. This double structure appears clearly in Manichaeism where the "elite," the "chosen ones," are strictly distinguished from the "hearers" or "catechumens." The life of the elite is marked by the principle of abstinence of meat, wine and all sexual contact; while the hearers had to abstain from procreation. Marriage was tolerated and concubinage was permitted, but the procreation of children was to be avoided.²⁹²

The Alexandrian Father points to their hostility to the people of the Church when he relates that during the Arian persecution, the governor, because he was a Manichee, helped the Arians to persecute the people severely.²⁹³ It is remarkable that while the Gnostics and Manichees considered themselves the superior Christians and the only accurate and faithful interpreters of the Gospel,²⁹⁴ Athanasius denies for them even the title of Christians. He points out that "those who followed Marcion were called Christians no more, but henceforth Marcionites; ... [likewise] some are accosted as Valentinians, or as Basilidians, or as Manichees."²⁹⁵

Together with the Gnostics and Manichees, Athanasius purposed to mention the Meletians.²⁹⁶ He adds, "So too Meletius, when rejected by Peter, the Bishop and Martyr, called his party no longer Christians but Meletians."²⁹⁷ In fact, we have nothing to assure us that the Meletians developed a particular attitude to marriage, but they cultivated a rigorous ascetic ideal, claiming to be an elite as the Church of martyrs. The available Meletian papyri show us that the Meletian group forged links with Coptic monasticism as they organized their own monasteries.²⁹⁸ Athanasius mentions their claim of preeminence, and emphasizes that Antony "never held communion with the Meletian schismatics, knowing their wickedness and apostasy from the beginning."²⁹⁹

In the early centuries of the Christian era, the dividing line that had come to separate the Encratites from the rest of the Christian communities, a line based on sexual abstinence,

actually reinforced the distance between a heroic celibacy of the elite and the average life of the ordinary Christians. Those who became ascetics were held in high esteem. Origen described the ascetics as the true philosophers, while Hierakas, the Egyptian Ascetic, claimed that only the unmarried had a place in God's kingdom.³⁰⁰ The enthusiastic praise of celibacy by the Encratites became a devaluation of marriage. Celibacy came to be considered as a superior degree of perfection, or even the consequence of a dualist conception of the universe, which devaluates the body and the material side of creation.³⁰¹

Thus, the cleavage became considerably marked between the elite dedicated to renunciation on one side, and the ordinary Christians on the other side. By the year 300 A.D., Christian Asceticism was associated with some form or other of perpetual sexual renunciation.³⁰² Eusebius of Caesarea (c.260-c.340 A.D.) posited two grades of Christian conduct, the first for the laity who might participate in marriage, and the second for clergy requiring celibacy.³⁰³ A little before 303, the Council of Elvira in Spain declared in Canon 33 that "bishops, priests, deacons and all the members of the clergy connected with the liturgy must abstain from their wives and must not beget sons."³⁰⁴ If we believe Socrates, the idea of the celibacy of the clergy was so dominant at the Council of Nicaea that the Egyptian Bishop Paphnotius rejected a proposal to compel all clergy to give up conjugal relations with their wives.³⁰⁵ In the West, a legal position was gradually reached by which all the clergy must be celibate. Max Weber suggests that the decisive reason for priestly celibacy in Occidental Christianity was "the necessity that the ethical achievement of the priestly

incumbents of ecclesiastical office not to lag behind that of the ascetic virtuosi, the monks." ³⁰⁶

According to Athanasius, the case is different. He chose a balanced and comprehensive stance on the issue of sanctification in relation to marriage. First of all, he puts celibacy for the bishop not for the priest. It is known that he was the first incumbent of the Alexandrian See to ordain monks as bishops. In the year 354 or 355 A.D., he writes to urge the Abbot Dracontius not to refuse the episcopate. In order to encourage him, he proves that he is not the only one who has been elected from among the monks, mentioning a number of monastic superiors who became bishops. ³⁰⁷ It is not without meaning that when he describes his own election to the See of Alexandria in 328, Athanasius says that the choice of a majority of Egyptian bishops fell on him because he is "pious, Christian, an ascetic; a genuine bishop." ³⁰⁸

Secondly, Athanasius defined the life of sanctification in a two tiered way: virginity, "the angelic and unsurpassed", for the idealist elite, and marriage, "the more moderate and ordinary," for common believers. ³⁰⁹ As mentioned before, if virginity is called a "holy and unearthly way," marriage is called "blessed" and "honored;" ³¹⁰ and if virginity "has the more wonderful gifts ... and grows the perfect fruit, namely an hundred fold," that is because "it is rugged and hard to accomplish." ³¹¹ The rule asserted here by Athanasius is the "Chastity of every one." ³¹² Both virginity and marriage are two aspects of God's call. He announces, "The call is made to virginity, and self-denial, and conjugal harmony, ... assigning to each its own virtues and an honorable

recompense." ³¹³ "Now if a man choose the way of the world, namely marriage, he is not indeed to blame, yet he will not receive such great gifts as the other." ³¹⁴ Antony, for example, followed the call, "If thou wouldst be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor; and come follow Me and thou shalt have treasure in heaven." (Matt. 19:21) ³¹⁵ "There are purely natural differences among men," writes Max Weber, "completely independent of any effects of sin; and these natural differences determine the diversity of destinies in this world and beyond." ³¹⁶ The Great Bishop of Alexandria clearly advocates the same idea when he comments on the parable of the Sower:

In sowing, He [God] did not compel the will beyond the power, nor is mercy confined to the perfect, but it is sent down also among those who occupy the middle and the third ranks, so that He might rescue all men generally to salvation. ³¹⁷

In this way, Athanasius dignified the masses of people, opening the door of heaven to all of them. He announces, "Although the dwelling place is various ..., yet all of us are within the wall, and all of us enter within the same fence." ³¹⁸

Unlike Clement and Origen, Athanasius did not regard spiritual "perfection" as the affair of "a select circle of highly trained Gnostics and intellectuals." ³¹⁹ Preaching in Coptic, he addressed himself to the communities of virgins and monks, as well as the masses of the Church. ³²⁰ He reached

the hearts of the highly diversified groups in his church, aiming in particular "to give a voice to the silent majority in the local church he was responsible for."³²¹ It is worth mentioning that during the Arian fight, the people protested against the uncanonical intrusion of Gregory. The claim of Athanasius is that "all things ought to have been inquired into and transacted canonically in the presence of the laity and clergy who demanded the change."³²²

Actually, Athanasius stretched the concept of the elite to include all the believers. They are "chosen in God before the foundation of the world ... having been predestined to adoption as children by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:4-5)."³²³ The Church, for him, is catholic, that is to say, universal; it is not a coterie of the spiritual elite. There is, of course, a place for the ordinary believers. "The whole Catholic Church ... celebrates together the same worship to God, when all men in common send up a song of praise and say, Amen."³²⁴ Contemplation is open to all, and not just to an elite; and sanctification is the call of all, whether St. Antony or the various recipients of the Paschal Letters³²⁵. Asceticism is available not only to the monks and virgins but also to the married. Athanasius admires monasteries, as well as the houses of the believers. For the cells of the monks he quotes, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, and your tabernacles O, Israel (Nom. 24:5)," and for the houses of the believers he records, "Every family and every house is considered a church."³²⁶

We conclude that Athanasius highly values the human being, both male and female, as well as the believers, both

ordinary and special, lay people and clergy, married and unmarried. Although virginity is available for the idealists while marriage for the common believers, yet both are divine ways of sanctification.

CONCLUSION

We will conclude this thesis by the statement of St. Gregory Nazianzus in the panegyric of St. Athanasius: "He was a patron of the wedded and the virgin state alike". Gregory called all virgins and married persons to celebrate and praise him, "for his life and habits form the ideal of an episcopate."¹ We will stress the following points:

1. Athanasius faced several conflicting attitudes to marriage. The Gnostic and Manichaean idea of defilement affected the view of sexual desire, and the life of sanctification was understood as appropriate to virginity more than to marriage. Within Christianity itself, Alexandrian writers like Clement and Origen denied sexual desire for the Christian and sided with the Stoic idea that procreation is the only reason that justified conjugal relations. It is true that both of them opposed Gnosticism, declaring that marriage is good, but at the same time, they held that its goodness has been perverted seriously by the Fall, and carried in it somewhere the infection of sin. Such a concept spread rapidly after the flourishing of monasticism. The finding of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts in the vicinity of a Pakhomian monastery, as well as the scrupulous concept of sexuality which, according to the *Letter of Amun*, prevailed in monastic circles, may prove the idea.

2. According to Athanasius, marriage is viewed as socially legal and tolerated, and religiously blessed and sanctified. The Alexandrian Prelate accepted the contemporary rules of marriage as a lawful institution, and gave it a supernatural dimension, although it was not yet considered a sacrament as we know today. He built his doctrine upon the saying of the Lord in Matt. 19:4-6, which recalls the story of the establishment of the institution of marriage, and asserts the principles of monogamy, sanctity, and indissolubility of marriage.² His view on marriage is that it is, like matter and body, not only sanctified but also a means of sanctification.

Indeed Athanasius responded to the religious attitudes and philosophical trends of his time. His response verified the moral character of sexuality and marriage which could prove them good against the ascetic condemnation. Although his ancestors, the Ancient Egyptians, maintained high regard for family relations and sexual morality, they allowed brother-sister marriage; a custom mocked in his writings.³ Athanasius rejected the attitude of the ascetic Gnostics and Manichees who considered marriage as defiled. He also rejected the view of the Stoics and Neoplatonists who even though approved of marriage, they depreciated body and sexual desire, allowing marriage only for the purpose of procreation. Thus, proclaiming the honor and sanctity of marriage, Athanasius endeavored to free the marital conscience from the complex concept of defilement imposed upon it. This is the doctrine which he preached and asked his fellow bishops thus to exhort and strengthen their flocks.⁴

As far as we know, there is no trace in his writings of the concept of defilement and depreciation of marriage. He preached the positive value of marriage in a time when the idea of magnifying virginity and degrading marriage prevailed. Nevertheless, Athanasius responded to the challenge of abstainers in a way that could at the same time restrain sexuality severely against the antinomian licentiousness. Marriage is an awesome commitment seen in all its meanings of monogamy, fidelity and indissolubility. Therefore, we can consider Athanasius' doctrine as a turning point in the Christian view of marriage towards legality and sanctity.

3. Athanasius recognizes as normal the secular marriage concluded according to the Roman law. It is a natural union between man and woman designed by God who created male and female and blessed them to be fruitful. Marriage has been from the beginning a divine institution. After the Fall, God did not revoke the first benediction, but when sin entered into the world, man "used nature licentiously." Marriage then is in accord with nature, but adultery and homosexuality are crimes against nature.

At the same time, while marriage in general is legally allowed and is a natural provision for all people, Christian marriage, in particular, is put under the category of sanctification of God's grace. The spouses are members of the body of the Lord, and their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Through this new nature, they return to the holy state that existed before the Fall.

In addition, the goodness of marriage in terms of natural law was understood as having its goal in the preservation of the race. Athanasius does not make this dichotomy between the exercise of sexuality whose only aim is procreation, and the "harmonious" love of married persons. Besides, the spiritual and corporal aspects are interdependent. Christian marriage is more than a reality of the natural order. Athanasius' belief in God's grace gave marriage a supernatural dimension which complements the natural institution. It is meant to symbolize in its exclusiveness and indissolubility the union of Christ and the Church, and thus it is highly honored and sanctified. It includes of course the natural reality of human sexual love but it involves the gifts of grace and the demands of complete fidelity. Nevertheless, God's grace is not presented as a magic power which suppresses human freedom. It is an experience where the spouses act in communion with God, encouraging each other in prayer and worship.

4. Marriage, as the natural way created by God, is bound upon the human race in general, but not on each individual. So, any person is free to choose marriage or to abstain from it. The Roman decree which penalized those who remained celibate was terminated by Constantine the Great. It is true that celibacy, embraced and encouraged by Athanasius, was the main feature of Gnosticism and Manichaeism, but its motives and grounds are completely different. When Athanasius welcomes virginity, it is not because marriage is defiled but because it is an expression of God's love. This love which led such a great company of martyrs to despise

death and sacrifice life, which is the gift of God, is the same which enabled young men, who have "not yet attained the lawful age of marriage," to sacrifice this good order and vow virginity which lies over and above the law ⁵. Athanasius puts Christian asceticism against non-Christian abstention, stressing that St. Antony, the great ascetic, had no connection with the Manichees.

However, virginity is not valued in itself as an unmarried state, but as a rugged and hard way of dedication. Quoting St. Paul, he announces: "All things are lawful, but not all things are expedient;" (I Cor. 10:23) so both marriage and virginity are lawful as "two ways of life," but everyone follows what is expedient according to his call of God. ⁶ The advice of the Alexandrian Prelate is as follows: "Let a man, whoever he is, strive earnestly; for the crown is given not according to position, but according to action." ⁷ Athanasius, in a likewise manner, balanced his attitude to fit society. On the one hand, in announcing marriage as "according to the law," he was able to understand human nature and to cope with the Roman Empire which did not welcome abstention but encouraged procreation. Probably he also wished to be blameless before the contemporary Emperors who were seeking to find a reason to get rid of him. On the other hand, he endeavored to satisfy the eagerness of his people for asceticism. He sponsored virgins, kept good relations with monks, and wrote the biography of Antony showing himself as his attendant. For the unmarried, he encouraged permanent virginity, and for the married, he recommended temporary abstention. Indeed, this is the

ideal way for a bishop to deal with all kinds of people. The majority are welcomed for marriage, and the minority to virginity. However, this minority is too few in number to bother the Empire.

5. Thus, Athanasius contributed to solving the social problem of the elite. Christianity is not a proposition for the chosen but a call for all people that they might find a practical and possible way of sanctification and "the chastity of each one."⁸ He chose a balanced stance: virginity for the idealist elite, and marriage for common believers. Both are ways of dedication to God. The door is open for the married to serve God as lay persons, deacons and priests, and for the unmarried to serve as nuns, monks and bishops. Accordingly, we can say that Athanasius' teaching is right, not only theologically but also socio-anthropologically.

6. Athanasius' way of examining the issue is both positive and realistic. Sanctification, for him, is not a negative withdrawal from the world, nor an external thing. It is a positive action of God's grace, so that life should adhere to the body and be combined with it.⁹ In marriage, supernatural grace is joined to the spouses to realize a real unity of both into one flesh. His view is also realistic. He accepts the material world with its natural beauty, and defends his flight from his enemies who wished to kill him, putting asunder what God has joined. The Alexandrian Pastor is the teacher of the stability of the family within the honorable marriage. By his realistic way of thinking, he prefers the good wife

to the immoral virgin; and the ascetic bishop who serves in the world to the careless monk who lives in the monastery.¹⁰ In addition, allowing sexuality as blessed and sanctified, Athanasius realizes the nature of human beings. The believers are "men in Christ;" but by receiving His grace, they do not lose their human substance, as the Lord when he became man, "He was no less God."¹¹

We suggest that the teaching of Athanasius, the Alexandrian Pastor, is important, not only for his society but also for ours. This resembles the responsibility of the Church to feed society with positive principles for the edification of the family, and accordingly the whole society. It is true that he, like other Church Fathers, had no plan to change the face of society, but transforming the concept of marriage and family relationships is preparation for the complete transformation of society. Athanasius indeed acknowledges the purity of natural marriage, but at the same time, he recommends the supernatural grace of God existing in Christian marriage. This doctrine is important to give the family its needed stability and "conjugal harmony,"¹² in order to maintain close marital relationships permeated with love. Christian marriage shows the twain as joined by God into one flesh. For the individual, it is the great weapon against man's loneliness. When every spouse comes out of himself or herself to be one flesh with the partner, he or she can get out of his or her selfishness to meet with every person in society.

Likewise, Athanasius' attitude is a call to every Christian house to express its nature as a domestic church by "the goodness of its inmates and the prayers offered to God". It receives the grace to give and reveal itself as a power of love and sacrifice for the benefit of society.¹³ In addition, periods of temporary and voluntary abstention enrich marital love, for at such times, the depth of love shows itself in many different ways. When a couple spends time together in prayer and helping others, they find their love filled with a new energy from God, the Creator of marriage and sexuality from the beginning.¹⁴

7. Athanasius' concept of the sanctity of marriage corresponds with his general doctrine of sanctification; for example:
 - a. The Creator of matter and the body is God himself. He is neither the evil god of the Gnostics and Manichees, nor the intermediate god of the Arians. The good God is the Creator of the body and "honorable marriage" alike.
 - b. There is no contradiction between body and spirit, natural and supernatural. It is not inconvenient for God to deal with matter and to grant his grace for joining the twain into one flesh.
 - c. In the light of the Incarnation, the human body is revealed, by association with the Lord, to be holier

than anything else in the material world . The mentality of Athanasius, the advocate of the Incarnation, could easily recognize the sanctity of marriage.

- d. Evil is not a part of the nature of things. It has no substantial existence, but it is the negation or the abuse of the good. Similarly, sexual relations are good within marriage, but adultery is its abuse.

 - e. The Creator is Himself the Savior who purified man's free will to be the source of conjugal fidelity. In His flesh, the Lord sanctified man and presented the Church, His bride, "holy and without blemish."
15

 - f. As man's cooperation and perseverance are important for keeping sanctification, not only for the individual but also for the family. When the spouses encourage each other in virtue, they will have their marital life blessed, their bed undefiled, and their house as a small church.
8. Athanasius' approach to the doctrine has been developed according to events and circumstances he experienced. Three different stages are to be distinguished: (a) the beginning of his ministry, (b) the flaring of Arianism, and (c) the flourishing of monasticism.

- a. The first stage is represented in his first two writings: *Oratio contra gentes*, and *Oratio de incarnatione Verbi*. Although the date of these two treaties is debated, the fact that there is no trace of the Arian controversy nor of the Nicene theology favors an early date of his life. In these two tracts, as well as in his first *Paschal Letter* of 329 A.D., the prime doctrine of the Alexandrian Doctor is expressed. Marriage is shown as the lawful use of sexuality created by God and saved by Christ, the Lord of childbirth; while adultery and homosexuality are condemned as the evil abuse of the good institution.¹⁶ Of course, this attitude might be manifested in his first Pastoral Letter where the Alexandrian Leader blows the festal trumpets which call for virginity and "conjugal harmony," side by side with prayer and festal celebration. The Spouse of the *Canticle* is praying, "O that Thou wert my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother." (8:1) The Great Pastor preaches that God's supernatural grace is added to the natural marriage. Athanasius' simple and quiet spirituality reveals the peaceful time at which he was brought up in the Church, after the end of the Great Persecution. It is true that he himself was persecuted by Arian authorities, but this was after he had already developed his thoughts and doctrines. The absence of the idea of an imminent *Parousia* helped him to feel the stability of the world and its institutions.

- b. With the Council of Tyre in 335 A.D., the Arian riots flared against him. On account of his first exile, he was unable to write letters for the years 336 and 337 A.D. After his return to Alexandria, he wrote his tenth Letter for the year 328 A.D. He brilliantly combined the Arian controversy with the issue of the sanctity of marriage, and succeeded in recruiting the masses of married people, beside the virgins and monks, in the battle of faith. Now he speaks openly about Arius and his failure to recognize the divinity and the saving work of the Lord. Unless Christ is divine, He cannot sanctify man's life. The Savior is shown as the Sower of grace in the field of the Church which brings forth virginity and "honorable matrimony." Athanasius announces God's call for "the chastity of each one," and preaches that all believers will enter within the heavenly fence. Supporting the orthodox faith against Arianism is shown as the concern of virgins and monks in their cells, as well as the majority of married people in their houses. In addition, in his *Orationes* and in his *De Decretio contra Arianos*, the Sonship of God's Word from the very essence of the Father is likened to human sonship,¹⁷ an experience which touches the hearts of all parents. Furthermore, he combined, probably on purpose, the Arians with the Gnostics and Manichees whose attitude was against marriage and the family. No wonder that he enjoyed not only the support of Antony and his flock of monks, but also of every family who expressed their joy of his return from the exile by transforming every house into a church for the purpose of defending the true faith.

- c. After the flourishing of monasticism, the Biographer of St. Antony repeatedly showed the Desert Fathers caring for families as well as monks, and did not forget to mention that Antony is the fruit of a pious couple. He also writes to Amun, the Nitrian leader, about the purity of sexual secretion, citing that "marriage is honorable and the bed undefiled." (Heb. 13:4) If virginity is "angelic and surpassed," the reason is that it is "rugged and hard to accomplish." When he writes to the virgins, he teaches that Christ spoke of virginity but He did not intend to withdraw His support from marriage. Those who choose virginity might not say with Hieracas that marriage is bad because virginity is better; otherwise they even lose the good, which is the natural ideal of marriage "that the Greek false gods and poets sang about."¹⁸

It is remarkable that within these different circumstances, his principle did not change, even though his approach was developed. Marriage is proclaimed as honored and sanctified. In the first *Pastoral Letter* he declares that God's Word assigns to both virginity and marriage "its own virtues and honorable recompenses," and in the tenth he affirms that "honorable matrimony" is sown in the field of the Church. Later on, he writes to the second generation of monasticism defending the sanctity of marriage. His attitude is reflected indirectly even when he discusses different issues. For example, when he defends his flight, he likens the unity of the human soul with its body to that of the husband with his wife, concluding, "What God hath joined together let not

man put asunder", and when Eusebius the Arian moves from one parish to another, he is considered as an adulterer like the husband who divorces his wife.

9. Nevertheless, we feel a kind of drawback in Athanasius' doctrine. Although he announces in his *Paschal Letter* for the year 338 A.D. that the heavenly reward is "various in proportion to the advance in moral attainment", and declares in his *Letter to Dracontius* (354 or 355 A.D.) that "the crown is given not according to position but according to action," he writes in his *Letter to Amun* (before 354 A.D.) that virginity "grows the perfect fruit, namely an hundred fold," and marriage brings forth fruit, namely thirty fold. (Mark 4:20) In this way, Athanasius supposes that perfection is possible only for those who embrace virginity. Moreover, he describes the call of St. Antony that he adopted the ascetic way when he was struck forcibly by Mt. 19:21, "If you wish to be perfect" This raises the question: Is perfection then impossible for those who continue to live in society, marrying and bringing up children? However, to give him an excuse, we mention that he writes to Amun to encourage his monks in their ascetic way promising them the perfect recompense in return of their sacrifice, while he writes to Dracotius to convince him to leave his monastery and accept the episcopate in the world. The *Paschal Letter*, of course, is meant to reach the mass of married families beside monks and virgins. The Bishop adopts suitable style in order to be able to address different kinds of people.

10. According to available sources of Athanasius, some elements of the subject are not discussed, such as second marriage, mixed marriage, prohibited degrees, and the issue of contraception. and

11. Finally, we wish to suggest some further points of research related to the subject of this thesis:

I. Athanasius' concept of virginity.

Analyzing the ascetic works of Athanasius as well as his other works will clarify his concept of virginity, his relations with virgins and monks, and his ascetic attitude in Egypt, the country of monasticism.

II. The influence of St. Athanasius' doctrine of marriage on the Church of Alexandria.

Such a great leader has influenced the Alexandrian Church Fathers after him. St. Cyril the Great of Alexandria (died in 444 A.D.) and others are to be traced, and the development of the concept and rite of marriage is to be examined.

III. Comparison of the concept of St. Athanasius with that of St. Augustine.

St. Augustine (354-430 A.D.), the Bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa, lived as a Manichee from 373 to 382 A.D. After his ordination in 388, he was called upon to deal with three heresies: Manichaeism, Donatism, and Pelagianism, all of which had something to do with marriage and asceticism. Through his struggle with these three systems, of course he formed his viewpoint of the doctrine of sanctification in general and the sanctity of marriage in particular. Most probably there were interrelations between Egypt and North Africa.

IV. The same comparison with the Cappadocian Fathers.

The three Cappadocian leaders of Christian Orthodoxy, almost contemporary to Athanasius, are St. Basil of Caesurae, St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Gregory of Nyssa. They were all Cappadocian by birth, and lived in the later fourth century A.D. They have considerable works on marriage and asceticism.

V. The same comparison with St. John Chrysostom.

Chrysostom (347-407 A.D.), the Bishop of Constantinople from 398 A.D., is a great exegete of the Bible. All through his plentiful works, he discussed the issue of the sanctity of marriage. A

comparison between the concepts of both saints will be a contribution of considerable importance.

NOTES

- 1 Greg. Naz, *Orations* 21:5, 10, 37, in *LNPF*, ser. 2, vol. 7, pp. 270-280.
- 2 It is worth mentioning that the rite of the Coptic Church until the present cites the Gospel of Matt. 19:1-6 to be read during the marriage ceremony, contrary to most of the Churches who use Jn. 2:1-11.
- 3 *Con. Gen.*, 12:1, 4, pp. 10-11.
- 4 *Amun*, p. 557.
- 5 *De Inc.*, 48, 51, pp. 62-64.
- 6 *Con. Gen.*, 4:5; *Amun*.
- 7 *Sur La Virginité, citation chez Chenoute*, Ed. Lefort, *Op. cit.*, p. 86; *Ad Dracontium*, 9, p. 560.
- 8 *FL Syr.*, 10:4.
- 9 *De Inc.*, 44.
- 10 *Sur La Virginité, citation chez Chenoute*, Ed. Lefort, *op. cit.*, p. 86; *Ad Dracontium*, 9, p. 560.
- 11 *De Dec.*, 14, p. 159; *Con. Ar.*, III.19, p. 404.
- 12 *FL Syr.*, 1:3, p. 307.
- 13 *Hist. Ar.*, 25, p. 278.
- 14 *Ibid.*

- 15 *Cor. Ar.*, II.67, p. 385.
- 16 *Con. Gen.*, 5,26; *De Inc.*, 2,5,18.
- 17 *Supra*, ch. IV.4.
- 18 *Sur La Virginité*, Ed. Lefort, *op. cit.*, pp. 66-67.

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